

A movie poster for 'The Return of Sexton Blake'. The background is a dark, grainy image of a man in a trench coat and hat walking in a rainy street. The title 'THE RETURN OF Sexton Blake' is written in a large, stylized, orange-outlined font. The words 'THE RETURN OF' are in a smaller, white, sans-serif font above 'Sexton'. 'Sexton' and 'Blake' are in a large, flowing, orange-outlined script font. In the bottom left corner, the text 'As brilliant as Holmes, as daring as' is written in a white, serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is an orange circle containing the text 'NEW & CLASSIC CRIME' in a white, sans-serif font.

THE
RETURN
OF

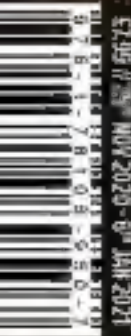
*Sexton
Blake*

As brilliant
as Holmes,
as daring as

NEW &
CLASSIC
CRIME

**NEW &
CLASSIC
CRIME
STORIES!**

Including **Sexton Blake** and the *Terror of Troll Island!*



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A PUBLISHING HISTORY OF SEXTON BLAKE

BY MARK HODDER

IN DECEMBER OF 1922, the one thousandth issue of the *Union Jack* story paper was published. On page 12, it carried images of the first and second issues, which had appeared way back in 1894, and proclaimed that the detective Sexton Blake made his first appearance in the latter, in a yarn entitled *Sexton Blake — Detective: The Story of a Great Mystery*.

For twenty years or so, this claim went unchallenged. It was even repeated in the 1940 *Sexton Blake* annual.

However, in 1943, a man named Walter Dexter, a world authority on Charles Dickens, was undertaking research in the British Museum when he came across issue 6 of *The*

Halfpenny Marvel, dated 13th December 1893. It featured a Blake story entitled *The Missing Millionaire* by Hal Meredith.

Further investigation revealed that Meredith (sometimes misspelt "Meredith") was actually a man named Harry Blyth, and it was he who had in that tale created Sexton Blake.

Born in 1852, Blyth worked mainly as a Glasgow-based freelance journalist and writer of pantomimes. When he penned a series of articles—*Third Class Crimes*—for *The Sunday People*, they caught the eye of Alfred Harmsworth, the founder of Amalgamated Press.

This was when fiction aimed at youngsters was being churned out in "penny dreadfuls," cheaply produced newspaper-format weeklies, hastily written and brimming with "blood and thunder." It also coincided with the height of Sherlock Holmes's popularity, one of the first ever literary crazes, which is why the dreadfuls were at that time packing in as many detective yarns as their overworked and underpaid authors could manage.

Harmsworth wanted a piece of the action, so he launched *The Halfpenny Marvel* with the stated intention of providing a higher standard of fiction at half the price of its competitors. Some might say it turned out to be half the price but twice as dreadful, but that's neither here nor there. At Harmsworth's behest, its editor, 18-year-old (and marvellously named) Somers John Summers, commissioned Blyth to give the paper a resident detective.

The story goes that Blyth presented Summers with "Frank Blake" but the name was considered too ordinary and after a discussion was changed to the more exotic and mysterious-sounding Sexton Blake. Blyth's son disagreed with this version of history, claiming that his father had asked him which name he preferred, Sexton Blake or Gideon Carr, and the former



Union Jack, issue 1000, page 12



The Halfpenny Marvel, issue 6

was chosen. However, since Blyth also wrote yarns featuring Gideon Carr, it's probable that his son's recollection wasn't related to Blake's creation but rather to which of the fictional detectives he favoured.

The Missing Millionaire was the first of three *Halfpenny Marvel* yarns that predated *Union Jack's* *Sexton Blake* — *Detective: The Story of a Great Mystery*. All three, as well as the latter, were written by Blyth and, by modern standards, are virtually unreadable. The plots are deeply illogical, with events being strung together by means of entirely unconvincing coincidences; the characters are unsympathetic; and the grammar is frequently incomprehensible.

Certainly, it's probable that Blake would have rapidly sunk into obscurity were it not for Blyth being a "hand to mouth" species of writer who, when offered nine guineas for the first story along with all rights to the character, readily accepted. That allowed Somers John Summers to commission other authors to pen Blake adventures. Blyth contributed only four more before his premature death from typhoid in 1899. By then, a number of other men were in on the act, foremost among them being William Shaw Rae, who brought a sense of consistency to what, in modern parlance, could now be considered a franchise.



Union Jack, issue 53 page 2

Having featured in *The Halfpenny Marvel* and crossed into the *Union Jack*, Blake also appeared in *The Illustrated Chips*, from the outset establishing himself as a character who would grace the pages of multiple publications.

Up until 1904, the various writers had the detective more or less as a lone operative. Nondescript assistants came and went, with the longest-lasting being William Shaw Rae's unfortunately named Chinese boy, We-Wee. Then, in *Union Jack* issue 53, Herbert Maxwell (a pseudonym of W. J. Lomax) introduced Tinker, the resourceful urchin who'd henceforth become the detective's permanent sidekick.

That same year saw the arrival of the greatest and most prolific of Blake's early authors, William Murray Graydon, who relocated him to Baker Street, and a few months later, introduced his über-intelligent bloodhound, Pedro, and redoubtable landlady, Mrs. Bardell.

The comparison to Holmes, Watson and Mrs. Hudson was inevitable and, bolstered by the fact that the very first Blake tale had appeared, by complete coincidence, the same week that Conan Doyle shoved his creation over the Reichenbach Falls, it's no surprise that Blake was, for a long while, condemned as "the office boys' Sherlock Holmes."

IN DEEP WATERS!

A Thrilling Long, Complete Tale of Sexton Blake—The World-Famous Detective

The **1st POPULAR**
NO. 1014
EVERY
FRIDAY.



COVERED! "Come to me, Sexton Blake, and I will put a bullet through you!" heard a villainous voice.

The Penny Popular, issue 82

SEXTON BLAKE, DETECTIVE, CAPTURED BY BLACKMAILER!

VOL. 4 NO. 88

JAN. 31st 1914.

THE DREADNOUGHT.

"THE HEIR FROM NOWHERE"

1st



AN EXTRAORDINARY CASE, IN WHICH SEXTON BLAKE, THE GREAT DETECTIVE, MAKES NEW FRIENDS AND NEW ENEMIES.

Sexton Blake, although bound, made an attempt to rise, but Stanley pounced upon him and punched him brutally in the face. (Read the thrilling instalment of this powerful detection serial inside.)

The Dreadnought, issue 88

The comparison is entirely unfair. While it's true that he started puffing on a briar pipe (more often, cigarettes) and wrapping himself in a red, acid-stained dressing gown, Blake was always much more a man of action than Holmes ever was. His powers of deduction were remarkable but it was his fists that more often won the day. By the advent of the First World War, his **Union Jack** stories were more Indiana Jones than Sherlock Holmes.

If there was anywhere that he was more cerebral, it was in the long run of very short mysteries that appeared weekly in **Penny Pictorial** from 1907 to 1913 and in **Answers Weekly** from 1908 to 1911. In these little tales, he feels almost like a different person, operating alone and taking a break from Baker Street.

Though the global conflict brought severe paper shortages, Sexton Blake prospered. By then, he was appearing in **The Marvel**, **Illustrated Chips**, **Union Jack** (which, from 1905, styled itself "Sexton Blake's Own Paper"), **The Boys' Friend**, **Penny Pictorial**, **Answers Weekly**, **Penny Popular**, **The Jester**, **The Boys' Herald**, **Penny Pictorial**, **The Dreadnought** and **The Boy's Journal**.

Sexton Blake was ubiquitous. He wasn't just in the papers. There were theatre productions, silent movies, and even a wax disc.

The audience lapped it up. The detective became a celebrity. He was the Harry Potter of the era. Such was the demand, that even in the harsh wartime economy, Amalgamated Press was able to launch, in 1915, **The Sexton Blake Library**, a weekly booklet containing a novella-length story.

It's difficult to now estimate the word count during those heady years. Though the price and size of issues waxed and waned, it's certain that by 1922 no fewer than 400,000 words per month were being written about Blake.

The Roaring Twenties brought about his Golden Age. During the war, authors had introduced a new breed of criminal to the Blake yarns. It started with George Marsden Plummer, a disgraced Scotland Yard detective who, after being cheated (in his opinion) of an inheritance, sought to make a fortune by illegal means. Then came Count Ivor Carlar, a vicious psychopath; Dr. Huxton Rymer, a famous surgeon whose drug addiction sent him down the wrong path; Professor Kew, a doctor whose intellect was marred by a criminal kink; Mademoiselle Yvonne Cartier, a vengeful adventuress who would eventually become, to Blake, "the woman"; Prince Wu Ling, who was invented the same week as Fu Manchu and shared many characteristics; Aubrey Dexter, master cracksman; Leon Kestrel, impersonator extraordinaire; and a host of other such scoundrels and ne'er-do-wells.

The colourful villains loomed large throughout that



The Sexton Blake Library, First Series, Issue 1

marvellous decade, especially in the *Union Jack*, where they were illustrated to stunning effect by the incomparable Eric Parker. His colour illustrations gave the *Union Jack* covers a very distinctive look, unmatched by any contemporary publication, and his rendition of Blake is considered as definitive. The story paper flew off the newsstands.

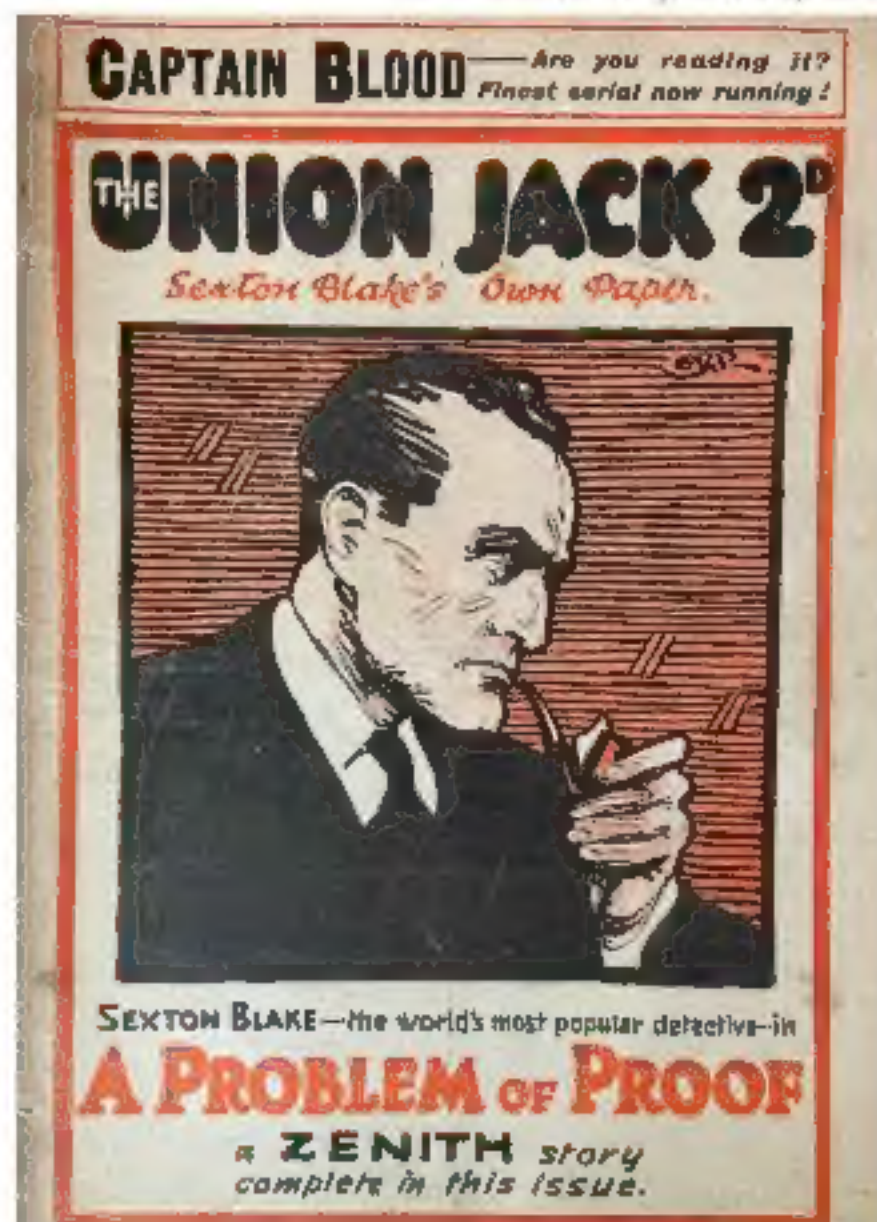
The very best of the Blake authors were now in evidence: Edwy Searles Brooks, with his dizzying exuberance; G. H. Teed offering evocative and exotic tales of far-flung places; Robert Murray Graydon (son of William), contributing the lengthy and brilliant saga of the *Criminals' Confederation*; Anthony Skene, with the best-loved of all the Blake villains, Monsieur Zenith the Albino; and Gwyn Evans, whose yarns reflected his own hilarious eccentricities. Many more; too many talents to mention.

Meanwhile, over at the *The Sexton Blake Library*, the covers were being provided by Arthur Jones, an artist whose draughtsmanship was, frankly, risible. Yet, for all his inability to draw a figure without making it resemble wet clothes draped over a wire hanger, his colour work was incredibly atmospheric, giving every issue a unique feel.

Imagine living in those times, knowing that every single week you'd get a new Blake yarn in the *Union Jack*, another in the *Sexton Blake Library's*, and more in papers such as *The*



The Sexton Blake Library, First Series, Issue 20



Union Jack, Issue 1,28

Detective Library, The Nugget, The Boys Realm, and The Popular! An absolute feast!

By the end of that amazing period, Eric Parker had nudged the rather old-fashioned Arthur Jones aside to become the de facto Blake illustrator. It marked the absolute apogee of Blake both in terms of artistic representation, creative storytelling, and popularity.

But what goes up ...

By the 1930s, there was a slip in circulation. Nothing desperate, merely a very slight downward tilt in the otherwise horizontal sales line. **The Union Jack** resorted to gimmickry. There was a "Sexton Blake is dead" issue; a giveaway Blake bust (fashioned by Eric Parker and now a rare item); a multiple author serial; and a "you guess the solution" mystery.

None of it stopped the decline.

Then an Amalgamated Press executive planted a seed. The falling sales, he suggested, could be traced to Ireland, where the title **Union Jack** was deemed undesirable. He had no evidence to support such a claim—in fact, the paper had always been wildly popular on the Emerald Isle—but nevertheless the notion took hold and, in response, the glorious **Union Jack** was transformed into the unwieldy, large-format and considerably less impressive **Detective Weekly**. The new paper eased out the supervillain opponents and, by doing so, haemorrhaged readers. Soon, it resorted to cut down reprints of old stories, until in 1935, it dropped Blake altogether.

The Sexton Blake Library now became the primary vehicle



Detective Weekly, Issue 1

for the detective's tales. It began to sport titles such as **The Nursing Home Crime, The Bathing Pool Mystery** and **Murder on the Pier**. All very pedestrian.

The yarns paled in comparison to what had gone before but for modern enthusiasts **The Sexton Blake Library's** of the 1930s and 1940s are wonderfully evocative of our grandparents' world. There's a sort of detached familiarity, perhaps a genetic memory of those grim inter-war years. You can feel the second conflict looming.

When it arrived, the war became the backdrop for the stories. For the most part, the detective confined himself to domestic crimes, with surprisingly few direct encounters with the Nazi or Japanese forces. For that, readers had to turn to a new medium.

From 1939, **The Knock-Out Comic** presented a comic strip version of the great detective. These strips saw Blake and Tinker teaming up with a Chinese inventor and engaging with the enemy in fantastic war machines, such as the Rolling Sphere and Flying Disc. Though aimed at a more juvenile market, these adventures harked back to Blake in his prime, and injected new life into the flagging franchise.

However, by the 1950s, both **Knockout** and **The Sexton Blake Library** were seriously in the doldrums. The comic strips had become childishly simplistic and the text stories repetitive. Eric Parker's covers appeared less frequently as he was gradually replaced by other, far less talented artists. Blake had hit his nadir.



The Sexton Blake Library, Second Series, Issue 94



The Sexton Blake Library, Second Series, issue 119

In 1956, W. Howard Baker took over editorship of *The Sexton Blake Library* and, in issue 359, presented a self-penned story entitled *Frightened Lady*. It immediately became the most notorious issue in the entire Blake canon.

Up to that point, the *Sexton Blake Library's* had undergone a number of changes. The first came in 1925, ten years and 382 issues after its launch, when for no clear reason the numbering rebooted to No.1. This marked the end of the "First Series" and the start of what was then called the "New Series" but which was later referred to as the "Second Series." In 1941, after 744 issues, the same thing happened again, kicking off the "Third Series." None of these reboots were accompanied by any visual changes, though the *Sexton Blake Library's* did, indeed, alter its appearance a number of times over the years, most notably in 1929, when Eric Parker supplanted Arthur Jones as the cover artist.

The Third Series is where it gets complicated. With issue 353—six stories before *Frightened Lady*—Baker introduced a new cover style, characterised by a red stripe down the left side along with "more pulpy" illustrations (these provided by various artists).

Then, with *Frightened Lady*, he did the unthinkable. He sidelined Tinker and gave Blake a very glamorous new assistant named Paula Dane. Baker Street ceased to be the base of operations. Now Blake had a smart new office suite in Berkeley



The Sexton Blake Library, Fourth Series, issue 359

Square. He was given staff, a pretty young typist, Marion Lang, and a receptionist, Miss Louise Pringle. Pedro was replaced by an office cat.

Blake became James Bond-ish.

Henceforth, the stories were pulpier, even drifting on occasions into science fiction and horror (though always with a plausible Scooby-Doo like reveal at the end).

Frightened Lady, then, became known as the first of the "Fourth Series" despite there being no change in the sequence of numbering. Furthermore, the Fourth Series also got a title. It was the "New Order."

The New Order was not popular with the old audience. This, they complained, was not "their" Blake at all. W. Howard Baker had, however, cleverly found a new and younger audience, and the *Sexton Blake Library's* kept ticking over. By 1960, after Blake's 21-year run in *Knockout* ended, it became the detective's sole vehicle.

Ultimately, the new audience wasn't big enough.

In June 1963, in issue 526, *The Last Tiger*, it was announced that Sexton Blake was finally retiring. After the story, a letters section bore glowing tributes, and on the back cover, there was printed a goodbye message from Blake himself.

1964 was the first year since his debut in 1893 that not a single Blake tale was published.

The end was premature. In 1965, *The Sexton Blake Library*

AS TINKER HAULED HIMSELF OUT OF THE PIT HIS WORST FEARS WERE REALISED!



SEXTON BLAKE

and the GHOST of the HIGHWAYMAN



A phantom highwayman, said to be the ghost of "Dashing Jack" Gunn, had been robbing travellers who passed by Gallows Hill Manor. Ace detective Sexton Blake and his assistant Tinker, who had taken shelter in the eerie mansion, found the phantom's lair, but as they approached his bed in the centre of a chamber they fell into a pit. With only the sound of the sleeping "ghost's" breathing breaking the silence, they struggled to escape...



WITH MUSCLE-STRETCHING EFFORT, TINKER MANAGED TO SCRAMBLE OVER THE RIM, BUT...



ONE OF US MUST GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE THAT CREATURE AWAKES! USE MY CLIPPED HANDS AS A STEP, TINKER, AND TRY AND REACH THE EDGE UP THERE!

RIGHT, GUY'NOR!

THE GHOSTLY FIGURE BROOD BESIDE THE BED, ITS GLAZED EYES GLARING AT THE YOUNG COCKNEY...



I'LL RUN FOR IT—I GOTTA LEAD 'EM AWAY FROM THE GUY'NOR!

A BLOOMY STAIRCASE LED OFF FROM ONE SIDE OF THE CHAMBER. TINKER LEAPT UP IT, WITH THE GLOWING FORM OF THE HIGHWAYMAN IN PURSUIT...



A DOOR—IT MAY BE AN ESCAPE ROUTE...

BUT IT WAS LOCKED! CURSING HIS L'CK, BLAKE'S ASSISTANT CONTINUED UP THE STAIRS UNTIL...

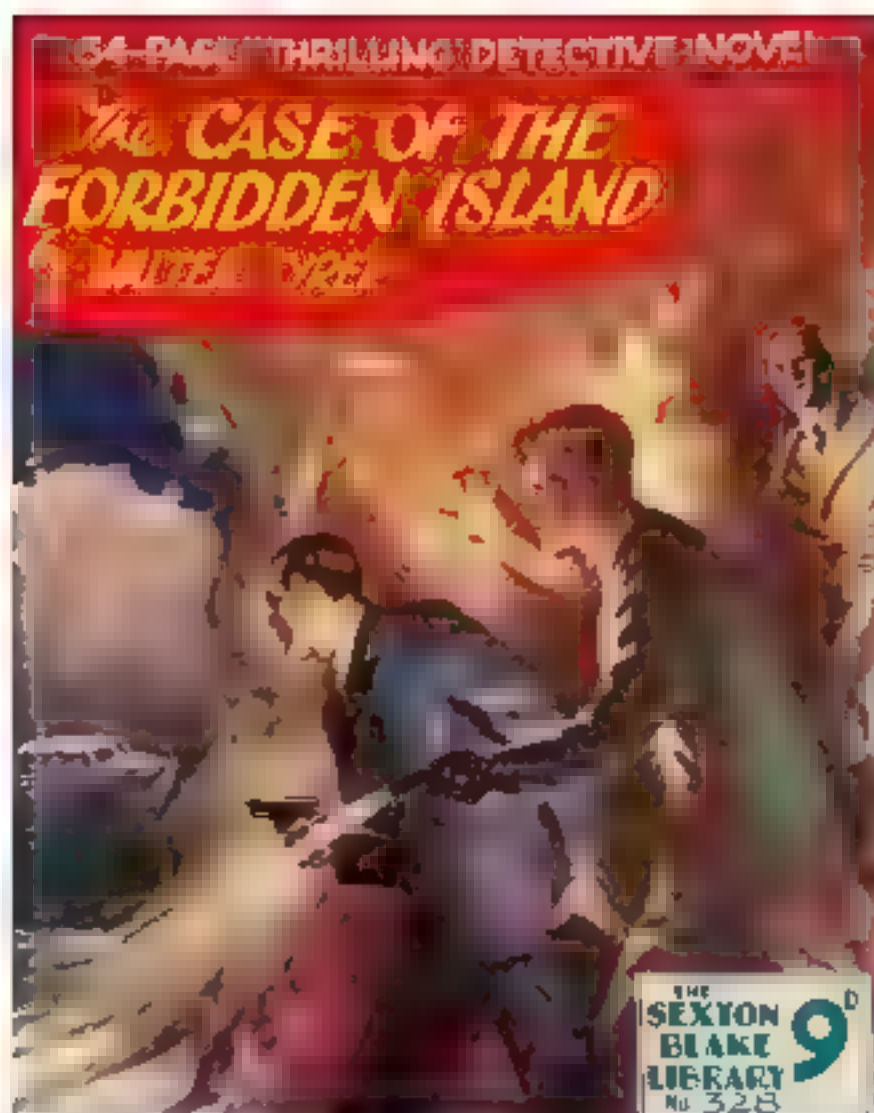


THIS MUST BE THE TOP FLOOR OF THE BUILDING! THERE HAS TO BE SOMEWHERE I CAN HIDE...

ONE OF THE DOORS LED INTO A SPACIOUS BELFRY...



I CAN'T RISK A PUNCH-UP WITH THIS HIGHWAYMAN JOKER YET, IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO ME, NO-ONE'LL BE AROUND TO GET MR. BLAKE OUTTA THAT PIT!



The Sexton Blake Library, Third Series, issue 328

Fifth Series began, this time in slim paperback format. Twenty were published that year, thirteen in 1966, eight in 1967, and just four in 1968. The dwindling numbers suggested that Blake was no competition for the likes of Bond, Matt Helm, Napoleon Solo, and Derek Flint. Yet, there was sufficient interest that ITV commissioned what turned out to be a very successful TV series starring Laurence Payne as Blake.

The show prompted *Valiant* comic to include a Sexton Blake strip, based on the series. It lasted from 1968 to 1970, by which point there was no other Blake material aside from occasional anthologies featuring previously published material.

In 1978, the BBC tried its hand at a Blake serial and failed miserably. The novelisation of *Sexton Blake and the Demon God* drew a line under the saga.

Now, let's backtrack to 1946. That year, a gentleman named Herbert Leckenby launched what, in modern parlance, would be called a fanzine. Titled *The Story Collector's Digest*, its 30-or-so pages were dedicated to the type of yarns that he'd enjoyed in his boyhood, those that featured in periodicals such as *Boys' Own*, *Magnet*, *The Gem*, *The Popular* and, of course, the *Union Jack*.

The *The Story Collector's Digest* was published monthly from November 1946 until May 2005 (along with an annual each Christmas), then intermittently until late 2007, when it folded. After Leckenby passed away in October 1959, the editorship had gone to Eric Fayne, and upon his retirement



The Story Collector's Digest, various issues

in January 1987, to Mary Cadogan, who saw it through to the end, by which point the generation of readers who fondly remembered those old papers had "turned the last page," so to speak. Mrs Cadogan died in September 2014.

From the outset, every issue of *The Story Collector's Digest* carried a Blakiana section, in which all things Blake-related were celebrated and discussed.

At the tail end of the 1990s, when the *The Story Collector's Digest* was struggling, I contacted Mrs Cadogan and asked permission to transfer Blakiana to the internet. I wanted to preserve the work of those who'd contributed to it and to also expand on it, hopefully bringing the detective, who by then was being fast forgotten, to the attention of a new audience. Mrs Cadogan was enthusiastic about the project and I was given free rein.

The Blakiana site kept Blake on ice as opposed to in the grave, and gradually interest rekindled. In 2009, I was asked to help compile a massive anthology.

Then, in 2014, the first officially sanctioned new Sexton Blake story since 1978 was published. It was marketed as issue 1 of the Sixth Series, entitled *The Silent Thunder Caper*, and it was written by yours truly.

We won't go into why it didn't feature on the New York Times best seller list but I have my theories.

The "relaunch" faltered. The publisher, a small but well-intentioned operation, hadn't the resources to properly market the endeavour.

Which brings us to the here and now. Rebellion Publishing has acquired the rights to Sexton Blake. It has prepared a series of new anthologies, for which I have been the editor .. and we'll see what happens next.

Blakiana is at: www.Blakiana.com





Sexton Blake

AND THE TERROR OF TROLL ISLAND!

Part 1

BY BILL HENRY & MIKE DOREY

LONDON - FEBRUARY, 1979!

A BITTER WIND SWEEPS OVER THE CHILL WATERS OF THE RIVER THAMES, HURLING A WHITE FURY OF SNOWFLAKES BEFORE IT IN SAVAGE GUSTS.

ON SUCH A NIGHT AS THIS THERE'S NO HONEST PROFIT TO BE MADE OUT OF DOORS!



ON THE OTHER HAND, FOR THOSE WHO SEEK A DISHONEST PROFIT...



LOOK AHEAD!
THE WHARF!
WE MADE IT!

SHUT YER
TRAP!

...SUCH A NIGHT HAS MANY ADVANTAGES

STOW IT, BRENT!
THERE'S NO ROZZERS
TO HEAR US TONIGHT!

NAH! ALL SENSITIVE
COPPERBELL BE IN SHUG
BENTHS UP YER! WE
GOT THE PLACE TO
OURSELVES!



BY THAT MOMENT - A
FLARE OF LIGHT!



RECKONED THERE'S A WHOLE
YER LAMPS ON!

STREWED IT'S

...SEXTON BLAKE!



A NAME THAT
STRUCK TERROR
INTO THE MOST
HARDENED OF
FOLK - DOERS - FROM
THE SLUMS OF
LONDON'S EAST END
TO THE FINEST
WATERFRONT OF
SHANGHAI. BLAKE
WAS THE PRIVATE
DETECTIVE WHO
NEVER GAVE UP A
CASE - OFTEN
SUSPECTING
WHERE THE
TOUGHEST
POLICEMEN
FAILED!



HOW DID HE
FIND OUT
ABOUT US?

WHO CARES?
ALONG THE
SHOOTING
TUG?

TEAM HE AIN'T
GOT A CHANCE!
IT'S FIVE TO
ONE - I

SUDDENLY, FROM ABOVE, A FIGURE
HURLED DOWN THROUGH THE AIR!



YOU'VE GOT YOUR
SOME WRONG,
MATE!

Y
A
G
H!

SHAME
I CAN'T
ON A
ROPE



BUT HE WON'T STOP ME! GRAB
'IM, BOYS - I'VE DEAL WITH
HIS INTERFERING BOSS!

THIN WITH A
DEEP THROAT
OR BL A
BL BY SHARP
LAUNCHED
ITSELF OUT
OF THE
SHADOWS!



WHA - WH-NO!



CAT IT OFF ME!
AAAHN!

DON'T STRUGGLE,
MY FRIEND - OR
RECK WILL TEAR
YOUR THROAT
OUT!

WITH THE SPEED OF A STRIKING COBRA, THE GREAT DETECTIVE SPRANG INTO ACTION.

HOW TO DEAL WITH YOU TWO!



BUT AS BLANE SWUNG AROUND

THIS TIME YOU STOP A BULLET, ENOUGH.

CLOSE, MY FRIEND...



...BUT NOT CLOSE ENOUGH!

AND THEN—THE NIGHT SILENCE WAS RIPPED APART BY THE URGENT SHRILLING OF POLICE WHISTLES.

AT RIGHT YOU LOT—THROW DOWN YOUR GUNS! WE'VE GOT THE WHOLE WHARF SURROUNDED!

DE, YUE! RECK' NEST THAT YOU'VE TIMBER!





YEAH YOU'RE
RIGHT GUY MON -
GOOD OLD CARTER -
LATE AS USUAL

STAY RIGHT
WHERE YOU

BLAKE!
WHAT THE DEVIL
ARE YOU DOING
HERE?



IT WASN'T THE FIRST TIME IN THE LONG CAREER THAT DETECTIVE INSPECTOR
JOHN CARTER OF THE C.I.D. HAD ARRIVED AT THE SCENE OF A CRIME TO FIND
SECTION BLAKE IN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION!

BUT HE'S HADN'T BEEN

ALL THAT BUSY LATELY, CARTER / SPENCER AND I NEEDED THE EXERCISE!

WE HAD A TIP OFF THESE RIVER-RATS WOULD
BE LANDING THEIR CARGO HERE TONIGHT!



BOFF, BLAKE - A
DIRTY
TRICK!

AND ONE IT GIVES ME GREAT
PLEASURE TO HELP SMASH!

WE'LL LEAVE YOU TO TIE UP THE
LOOSE ENDS CARTER! FINKEP AND
I HAVE SOME PAPERWORK TO
FINISH OFF, BACK HOME...



BUT WHEN THEY REACHED THEIR
BAKER STREET APARTMENTS

THE PHONE WAS THE
RICH & RINGING AT
THIS TIME OF
NIGHT!

PROBABLY
CARTER



BUT IT WASN'T THE
ECHO ANY MORE
DETECTIVE THE
VOICE THAT RANG
DOWN THE CRACKING
LINE WAS HIGH PITCHED
WITH TERROR!

YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME MR BLAKE
I'M IN TERRIBLE DANGER!

WHO'S THAT? WHERE
ARE YOU CALLING
FROM?



YROLL ISLAND, OFF THE NORTH CORNWALL COAST? M. MY NAME'S PHILIP MOFFAT. AND...

THAT'S ENOUGH, MOFFAT. I THINK WE CAN BRING THIS CONVERSATION TO A CLOSE NOW!



D'YOU THINK THAT'LL BRING HIM DOWN HERE?

ON YES - YOU PLAYED YOUR PART WELL. THAT'LL BRING HIM DOWN ALL RIGHT... TO HIS DEATH!



HE LO... HELLO?

DID HE RING OFF. GUY MORON WAS HE CUT OFF?

THAT'S WHAT I'M TRYING TO FIND OUT. HELLO? OPERATOR OPERATOR.



NO GOOD. EXCHANGE SAYS THE INF'S AS DEAD AS A DOORNAIL.

PACK A BAG TINKER AND GET OUT THE SILVER LADY! I WANT TO BE ON THE ROAD WITHIN TWENTY MINUTES!

TO CORNWALL?



YOU SHOULD KNOW BY NOW THAT I NEVER REFUSE A CRY FOR HELP, TINKER!

IN ANY CASE, THE CAR'LL EAT UP THE MILES. WE SHOULD BE THERE BY DAWN!



SOON, THE BIG ROLL WAS TEARING THROUGH THE OUTSKIRTS OF LONDON, HEADING WEST...

TROLL ISLAND! THAT RINGS A BELL. GUY MORON! ISN'T THAT WHERE THE MILLIONAIRE THRILLER WRITER EDGAR HOLLIS LIVES?

YES! BUT HIS BOOKS ARE REGARDED AS A TRIFLE OLD FASHIONED NOW AND HE LOST MOST OF HIS MONEY ON SLOW RACENORSES!



IS IT ECCENTRIC, ISN'T HE? YOU DON'T THINK TH'S IS SOME KIND OF PRACTICAL JOKE?

FOR HOLLIS'S SAKE TINKER, BETTER NOT BE!

ITS POWERFUL ENGINE HUMMING TERRIBLE SMOOTH, THE GREY PANTHER RAGED ON THROUGH THE NIGHT - UNTIL, AT LAST...

TEARFID! NO SNOW HERE - JUST A FLAMIN' PEA-SOUP!

CAREFUL, TINKER - THE CAUSEWAY TO THE ISLAND DOESN'T LOOK TOO SAFE!



SUDDENLY, FROM OUT OF THE EERIE SHIFTING WALL OF FOG...

A MAN... RUNNING!

OR ARE THERE TWO MEN? STOP THE CAR!



THEN, AS THEY SPRANG OUT OF THE CAR, THEY HEARD WHAT SOUNDED LIKE A DULL, TWANGING SOUND.

BLAKE - STOP! DON'T COME ANY - AAARGH!

WHAT THE DEVIL WAS THAT?



THEY SOON FOUND OUT!

MY GOD - A FEATHERED QUARREL! HE'S BEEN SHOT WITH A CROSSBOW!

I'M MOFFAT - I THOUGHT... IT WAS... A JOKE! BUT THERE'S... DEATH THERE...

DEATH! AAARGH!



HE'S GONE! BUT WHAT THE HECK DID HE MEAN BY A JOKE?

DON'T KNOW, TINKER! IF IT WAS A JOKE IT'S JUST TURNED VERY SOUR!



THERE'S A MANIAC LODGE WITH A CROSSBOW, ONLY YARDS AWAY FROM US - AND WE COULD BE HIS NEXT TARGET!

NEXT WEEK: THE PLOT THICKENS!



Sexton Blake

AND THE

TERROR OF TROLL ISLAND!

Part 2

BY BILL HENRY & MIKE DOREY

ANSWERING WHAT SEEMS TO BE A DESPERATE plea for help FROM A MAN NAMED MOFFAT, SEXTON BLAKE AND HIS ASSISTANT TINKER HAVE RACED DOWN TO THE WILD CORNWALL COAST - THEIR DESTINATION

TROLL ISLAND!

BUT ON THE CAUSEWAY LEADING TO THE ISLAND A MAN STAGGERS OUT OF THE FOG TOWARDS THEM - WITH A CROSSBOW BOLT IN HIS BACK

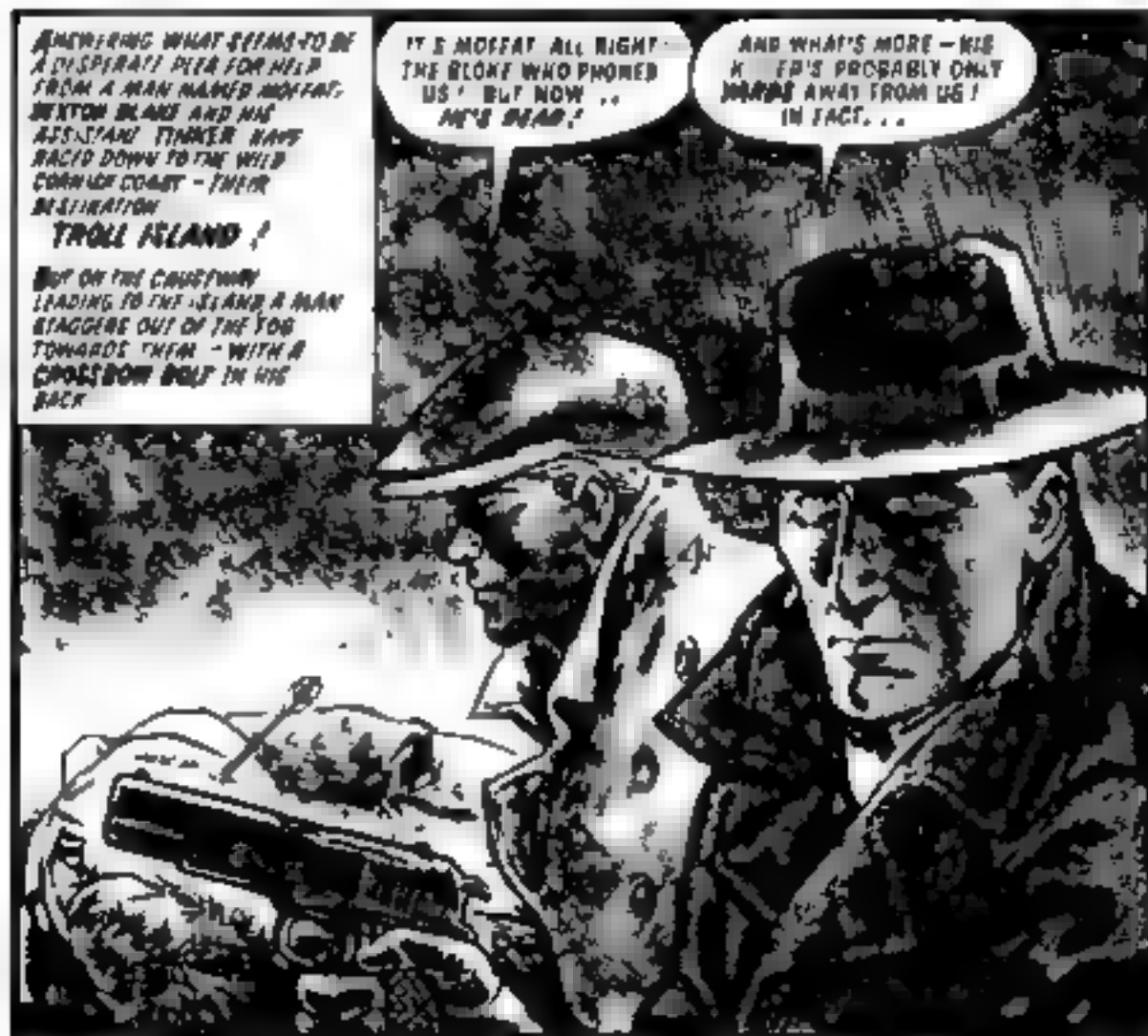
IT'S MOFFAT ALL RIGHT - THE BLOKE WHO PHONED US! BUT NOW... HE'S DEAD!

AND WHAT'S MORE - HIS KID'S PROBABLY ONLY WAYS AWAY FROM US! IN FACT...

THEN...

THUNDER! LOOK TINKER - THERE HE IS!

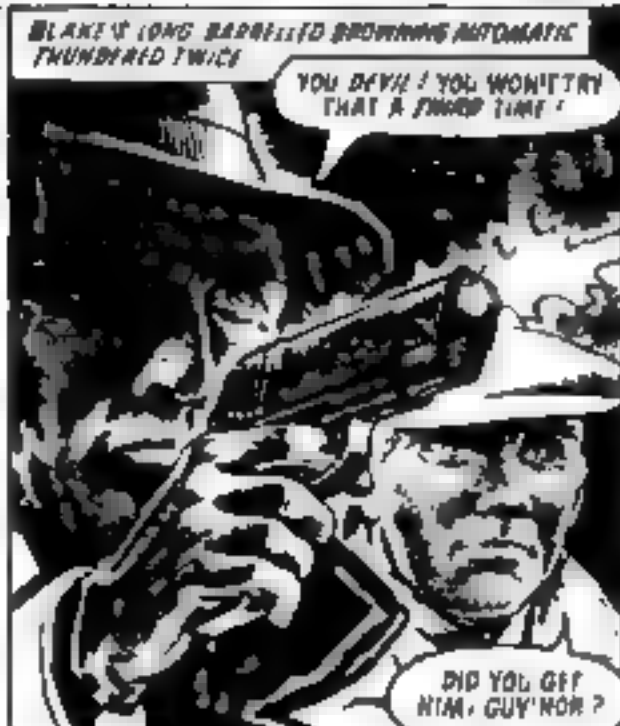
WHA...?



BLAKE'S LONG BARRELLED BROWNING AUTOMATIC THUNDERED TWICE

YOU DEVIL! YOU WON'T TRY THAT A THIRD TIME!

DID YOU GET HIM, GUY'NOR?



DON'T KNOW - COULDN'T EVEN SEE HIM PROPERLY IN THIS DAMNED FOG! BUT WE'LL CATCH HIM IN THE CAR

WHAT ABOUT MOFFAT?







WHAT
WHAT
WAS IT
GUY-NOR?

CRATTY AS I SEEM,
FINKLER... SOUNDED
LIKE A CANNON!



THEN, AS THEY DUNNET
OUT OF THE FOG...

BLIMPY!
IT WAS A
CANNON!

HOLD IT,
YOU TWO!

MAY, MAY, ASK
THE REASON FOR THIS
... INTRUSION,
SIR?



AND MAYBE ASK WHY
THE HELL YOU WERE
TRYING TO BLOW
OUR HEADS OFF
WITH A
CANNON-BALL?

NOTHING OF THE SORT, SIR! IT IS
MR. NO. 5'S CUSTOM TO LET OFF
THE CANNON AT 9 O'CLOCK EVERY
MORNING AND EVENING!

GRIFF 'D HEARD
HE WAS FOCUSING
BUT...



AT THAT MOMENT.

LOVE, ADLEY - WHAT'S GOING
ON HERE? WHO ARE THESE
PEOPLE?

THE NAME'S BLAKE
DEXTON BLAKE!

EDGAR HOLLE, THE
FAMOUS THRILLER WRITER AND OWNER OF
TROLL ISLAND, LOOKED STARTLED.



GOOD HEAVENS -
THE DETECTIVE!
WHAT ON EARTH
ARE YOU DOING
HERE?

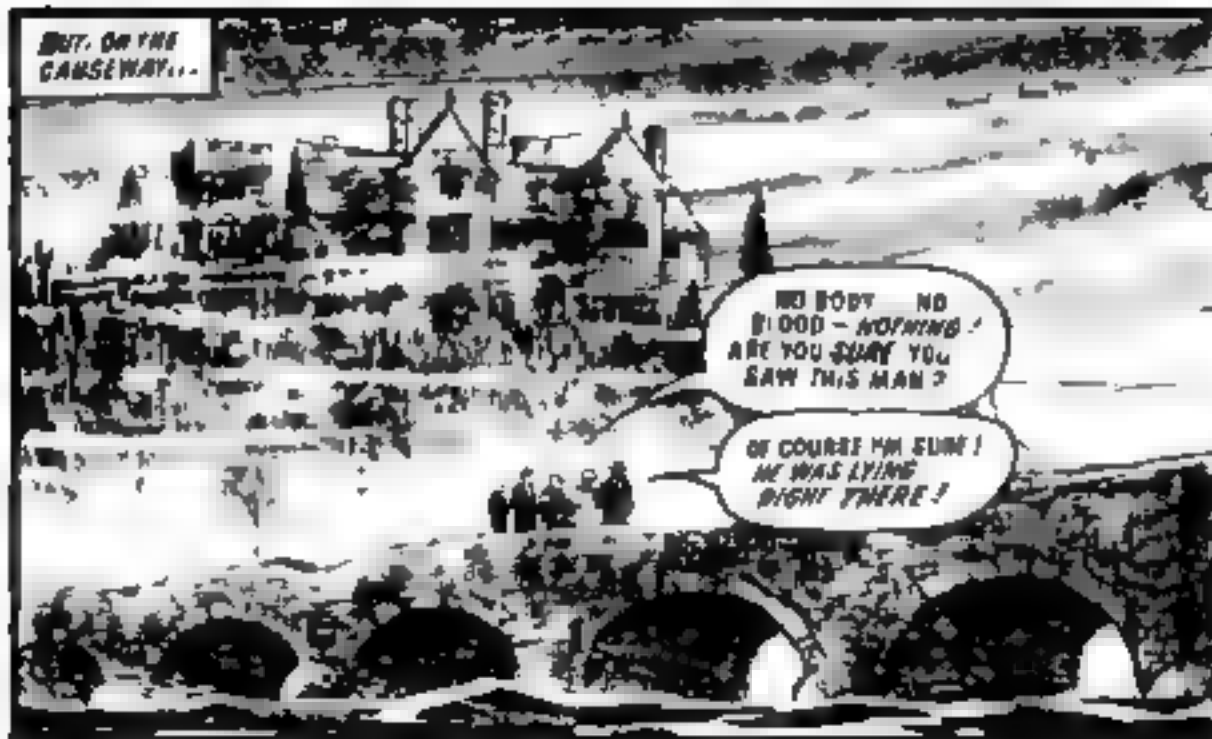
NEVER MIND THAT NOW! THERE'S SOMEONE FROM
THIS ISLAND NAMED MOFFAT OUT ON THE CAUSEWAY!
HE'S BEEN
MURDERED!



RE-MURDERED?

THERE'S NO ONE CALLED
MOFFAT ON OUR STAFF,
SIR! THERE MUST BE
SOME MISTAKE!

PERHAPS WE'D BETTER
TAKE A LOOK...



"FIRST - SYDNEY GOIT, MY PRIVATE SECRETARY! BAAH, SYDNEY!"

"THEN THE APPEY NAMED SAM SACK - WHO EDITED AL SEES IN NAVAL MATTERS, AND FACTURE RESEARCH!"

"AND KEVIN MINELLI, WHO CONCENTRATES ON THE WEIRD AND THE FANTASTIC! HORROR IS WHAT HE BRINGS TO MY BOOKS!"

"THIS IS JACK HAMILTON FEED, A CONNOISSEUR OF VIOLENCE AND BLOOD-LETTING! HE WRITES UP ALL THE SAVAGE FIGHTS AND CAR-SMASHES!"

"HERE'S ANGUS GOODALL, MY MILITARY EXPERT: A SPECIALIST IN ALL FORMS OF WARFARE!"

"AND FINALLY, J. B. LE GRIM - WHO EDITS THE BOOKS INTO MY STYLE, AND ALSO ACTS AS MY AGENT!"

"MY TWO BUTLERS, JOFFE AND ADIFT, YOU HAVE ALREADY MET!"

"WHAT A BUNCH OF VILANT GUYNOR! THEY ARE LOOK AS THOUGH THEY'D LIKE TO GIVE MOLLY'S THROAT!"

"THEN, AS ONE OF THE BUTLERS CAME UP..."

"I... I'VE GOT TO SPEAK TO YOU, MR. BLAKE! PRIVATELY! I... I'M URGENT!"

"ADIFT! ISN'T IT? WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

"I... I CAN'T KEEP SILENT ANY LONGER! THEY PLAN... TO MURDER YOU!"

"MEET WITH THE STEEL DEATH!"



Sexton Blake

AND THE TERROR OF TROLL ISLAND!

Part 3

BY BILL HENRY & MIKE DOREY

A MAN HAS BEEN MURDERED -
SHOT IN THE BACK WITH A
CROSSBOW - ON LONELY
TROLL ISLAND, HOME OF
DR. ADLEY & HIS TWO
WRITER EDGAR HOLLIS!

BUT WHEN SEXTON BLAKE AND
HIS ASSISTANT TINKER GO
TO FIND THE BODY, IT'S
VANISHED! NOW, ONE OF
HOLLIS'S BUTLERS MAKES A
STARTLING REVELATION!

I CAN'T KEEP
SECRET ANY
LONGER, THEY
THINK PLAN TO
KILL YOU!

KILL US? WHAT
DO YOU MEAN? HOW
PLANS TO KILL
US?

I... I CAN'T TALK NOW,
MR. BLAKE! NOT HERE!
FOLLOW ME DOWN TO THE
SERVANTS' QUARTERS!

ACT CASUAL, GUY! FOR
SOME OF THOSE HACKS ARE
GIVING US FUNNY LOOKS!

YOU'RE RIGHT! DON'T WANT TO GIVE THE GANG
AWAY! WE'LL GIVE ADLEY A COUPLE OF
MINUTES, THEN FOLLOW HIM!



ADLEY:
ALL RIGHT, ADLEY
START TALKING!

I NEVER RECALLED
THIS BUTLER'S ID NO
IN MURDER!



THE MAN ON THE
CALLS WAS
HE RECALLED
DEAD?

WITH SIX INCHES OF
CROSSBOW STIFF IN
HIS HEART, HE'LL NEVER
BANG THE TANGO AGAIN!



HE SAID HIS
NAME WAS
MONTAG...

MONTAG - YES HE HE
WAS AN ARTHUR...
AN SURVIVOR!
POOR DEVIL!

AND THE MAN
WHO HAD
HIT HIM WAS
INSANE!

WHO'S MAD? WHO
ARE YOU TALKING
ABOUT?

BUT IN THE DEEP SHADOWS AT THE
TOP OF THE STAIRS, CRUEL EYES
WATCHED HIS SCUM BLIND. A
BLACK-GLOVED HAND TUGGED AT
A WELL OILED MECHANISM...

HE WAS BOWING
HASTILY!

YOU HIT HIM,
CHIEF!

IT WAS THE FIRST 'CLICK' OF STEEL ON STEEL THAT SENT
DEXTER BLAKE INTO EXPLOSIVE ACTION!

LOOK OUT, MAN!

AND CURSE IT - BUT
AT LAST! MADE HIM
DROP HIS BOW!

STAY
HERE CRIME!
WE'LL BE
BACK!



LOOK -
ROUND THAT
CORNER!

WE'VE GOT HIM!
HE CAN'T GET
AWAY NOW!

BUT AS THEY REACHED
THE BEND...

NO! LOOK OUT, TINKER!

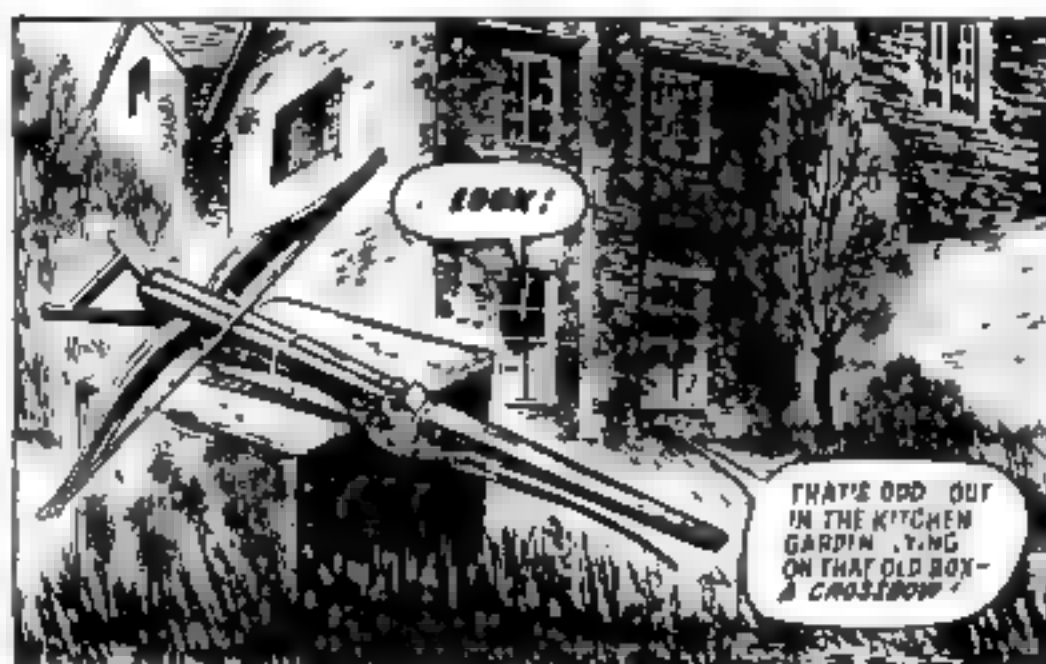
SUIT OF
ARMOUR -

AAAAH!











Sexton Blake

AND THE TERROR OF TROLL ISLAND!

Part 4

BY BILL HENRY & MIKE DOREY

A KILLER STRIKE THE SHADOWY CORRIDORS OF TROLL HOUSE - HOME OF THE FEARFUL THOUGHTS OF THE FEARFUL - ON A REMOTE ISLAND OFF THE COAST OF SCOTLAND!

SLOWLY, THE DEATH-COUNT IS RISING DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF SEXTON BLAKE AND HIS ASSISTANT TINKER

TWO MURDERS IN LESS THAN HALF AN HOUR, MR BLAKE! IT'S QUARTET!

I MET ABLE THE BUTLER, WITH A CROSSBOW BOLT THROUGH HIS HEART - THEN KEVIN ANNE, BLOWN TO BITS BY THE CROSSBOW ITSELF! BUT NOW THE HEIR WAS THAT DOME GUY MOR?

A SIMPLE BOoby TRAP TINKER WHEN HE LAY, PERCHED THE CROSSBOW ON THE BOX WAS PING ON A CORD ATTACHED TO THE WEAPON ALSO PULLED THE PIN OUT OF A GRENADE HIDDEN UNDERNEATH!



LIGHTNING SUDDENLY FLARED ACROSS THE DARKENING SKY...

WE'RE IN FOR A STORM, GUY MOR! LOOKS LIKE A BAD ONE...

I THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME WE PHONED THE POLICE, TINKER! THEY'LL HAVE TO KNOW SOONER OR LATER!

BUT... SLASHED TO RIBBONS! BUT THIS MUST'VE BEEN DONE LAST NIGHT!

OF COURSE - WHEN WE TRIED TO RING THROUGH FROM LONDON THE EXCHANGE SAID THE LINE WAS DEAD!



SAM SALT, ONE OF EDGAR HOLLIS'S TEAM OF WHITERS, IS TINKER FORWARD.

I, I THINK I MAY BE ABLE TO MEND THE PHONE, MR BLANE - BUT IT'LL TAKE SOME TIME!

JUST IN CASE YOU CAN'T - TINKER AND I WILL DRIVE OVER TO THE MAINLAND!



IF SAM SALT CAN MEND A BUSTED PHONE MAYBE HE CAN RIG A BOOBY TRAP? BUT HE LOOKS SUCH AN OLD CODGER!



LOOKS CAN BE DECEPTIVE, TINKER! MY GUESS IS THAT SALT WAS AN ALERT AND AGILE MIND! HE CERTAINLY COULD BE THE KILLER...

THE FRONT WHEELS OF THE POLS HURTLED INTO THE OBSTACLE...



I ADVISE AGAINST IT! THE WAVES WILL BE CRASHING OVER THE CAUSEWAY! EVEN YOUR CAR COULD BE HURLED INTO THE SEA!

WE'LL TAKE OUR CHANCES HOLLIS!



AS THE CAR STEERED DOWN THE HILL TOWARDS THE CAUSEWAY...

GUYMON, SOMETHING ON THE ROAD, SLOW DOWN!

TOO LATE! BLAND OUT, TINKER!



THEN THE BIG CAR CULM BURST ACROSS THE ROAD.

AAAARGH!





IN MY HEAD WHAT
HAPPENED?

CARRY ON HOME!
DON'T STOP THIS LONG,
AND WE'LL BE OUT
OF THE SPARK.



YES - AND WE'LL NEVER
MAKE IT ALIVE THE
CAUTION ON THE LOOK
AT THOSE BURNING!

BACK TO THE HOUSE
TINKER - WE'LL GO
OUT AT THE
OTHER CAR!



BUT AS THEY TRUDGED BACK THROUGH THE DARKNESS
BLOATING EYES WATCHED THEIR PATH...

BACK TO TINKER
HE HAD A PLAN TO
MAKE A CAR OUT OF
THE CAR - BUT
HE HAD A PLAN
TO MAKE A CAR
OUT OF THE CAR
HE HAD A PLAN
TO MAKE A CAR
OUT OF THE CAR



THE BURNING BLAZE
WAS A
PAINFUL ONE

TINKER -
LOOK OUT!



AAAAGH!

THE BURNING BLAZE
WAS A
PAINFUL ONE



THE BURNING BLAZE
WAS A
PAINFUL ONE

THE BURNING BLAZE
WAS A
PAINFUL ONE

NO GUN MO -
THE CAR IS JUST
A CAR!





NEXT WEEK:

DEADFALL!



Sexton Blake

AND THE TERROR OF TROLL ISLAND!

Part 5

BY BILL HENRY & MIKE DOREY

TURED TO A ROOM IN TROLL HOUSE, THE GLOOMY MANSION OWNED BY THRILLER WRITER EDGAR HOLLIS, SEXTON BLAKE AND HIS ASSISTANT, TINKER, WITNESS THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF HORRIFIC MURDERS ON A CLOSED-CIRCUIT TELEVISION SCREEN.

SUDDENLY, THE FLOOR GIVES WAY...

THE SNOW IS OVER, MISTER BLAKE!

UGH! — WE'VE WALKED INTO A TRAP!

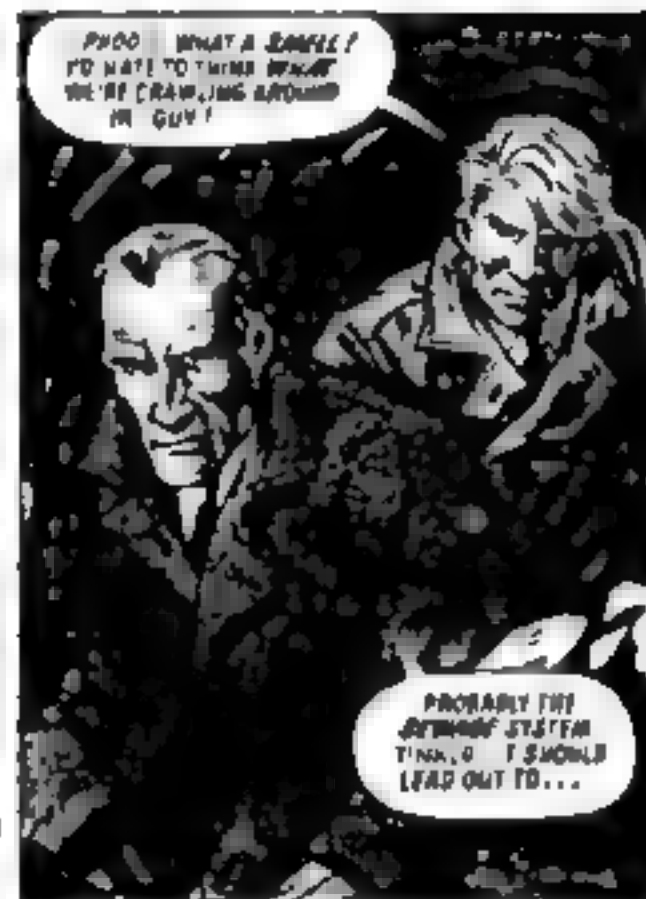
THE ICY WATERS OF AN UNDERGROUND STREAM ABRUPTLY HALTED THE FALL OF THE INTREPID SEIFUTHS...

LOOKS LIKE WE'RE IN "HOT WATER" THIS TIME, G-GUY!

I THINK NOT, TINKER. ALTHOUGH WE CAN'T CLIMB BACK UP THE SHAFT...

THERE IS ANOTHER WAY OUT!

GRABBING HOLD OF THE RUSTY IRON BARS, BLAKE TENSED HIS POWERFUL MUSCLES, AND SLOWLY BUT SURELY...





BLAKE FOUND HOLLE AND HIS WRITERS IN THE LIBRARY OF HOLLE HOUSE

BLAKE FOUND HOLLE COULDN'T HAVE DEVISED A BETTER SETTING FOR MURDER IF HE WAS WRITING IT INTO ONE OF HIS BOOKS!

TOO TRUE. THOUGH HOLLE'S BODY WAS PROBABLY HAVE BEEN DISPOSED OF BY NOW, BUT IT WILL BE VERY INTERESTING TO FIND OUT THE REACTION OF OUR ESTEEMED TEAM OF WRITERS

BLAKE SAW HOLLE'S SECRETARY AND MASTER LATER IN THE MURDER VIC. ONE



BLAKE FOUND HOLLE AND HIS WRITERS IN THE LIBRARY OF HOLLE HOUSE

DO FORGET WE START WITH FOR NOT DRINKING PROPERLY FOR NO. 1. THE SWEET PARTY

BLAKE!

GOOD MORNING MAN... WHAT'S GOING ON?

NNNNNGH!

WE CAN'T HAVE YOU DOING THIS...



WITHOUT CEREMONY, BLAKE STARTED TO SEARCH FOR THE HIDDEN CAMERA WHICH HE KNEW WAS IN THE LIBRARY

BLAKE SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL THE HISTORY OF THE DUTCH EMPIRE

LOFTS. STOP HIM!



...NOW CAN WE?

GRANDMAN IS A BIG STRONGMAN. HE'S A TERRIBLE MAN. HE'S A CHAMPION AND TO DEATH...



BUT BLAKE'S KNOWLEDGE OF ORIENTA, FIGHTING HAD GOT HIM OUT OF FAR TOUGHER SCRAPES THAN THIS ONE...



THAT'S ENOUGH FROM YOU MY FRIEND!

GOOD OL' GUY 'NOR? YOU KNOW 'IM NOW?



THANK YOU, TINKER YOUR ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN INVARIABLE. HOWEVER AS JOES NOW SEEMS TO HAVE BURIED HIMSELF IN A GOOD BOOK I SUGGEST WE TURN OUR ATTENTION TO MR. HOLLE.

FRIGHTENED THAT YOUR HIDDEN CAMERA WOULD BE DISCOVERED, WERE YOU?

I-ER-YES-I MEAN, NO!

GOODNESS ME! HAS HOLLE BEEN WATCHING US ALL WITH HIS CAMERA?



AND, OF COURSE YOU WOULDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE MURDER OF SIDNEY GOLF?

EH? IMPOSSIBLE!

BUT IT CAN'T BE!



WHY? WAS WITH HIM A FEW MINUTES AGO!

WE I, NOW STRANGE! I SAW HIM MURDERED OVER HALF AN HOUR AGO!

NOW PERHAPS YOU WOULD BE GOOD ENOUGH TO ORGANISE US A ROOM AND CHANGE OF CLOTHES... WOULD HATE TO DISAPPOINT THE KILLER BY DYING OF PNEUMONIA BEFORE WE MEET!... AND, MR HOLLE, I'LL SEE YOU LATER!



LATER... THIS BOOK BY HOLLE - THE NEVER ENDING NIGHTMARE - IS GOOD STUFF. I'D NEVER AVE SUSPECTED LADY ANDELA!

YOU WOULD HAVE IF YOU'D STUDIED HER ALIBI MORE CAREFULLY - MOST OF THE INACCURACIES APPEAR IN CHAPTER FOUR, I BELIEVE.

BUT WHAT OF OUR REAL LIFE MYSTERY, TINKER? WHY DO YOU THINK WE WERE CALLED IN?



SOMEBODY DOWN HERE
MUST HAVE A GRUDGE
AGAINST YOU! MEAN
THE KILLER HAS
ALREADY HAD A
CRACK AT DOING
YOU IN HASN'T
HE?

NO, TINKER. HE
HAS NOT! MOFFAT
AND ADLEY WERE
MURDERED WHILE
WE WERE PRESENT.
IF THE KILLER MERELY
WANTED OUR CORPSES
WE WOULD BE
DEAD BY NOW!

BUT THE UNDERGROUND RIVER
TRAP WAS ATTEMPTED MURDER!



COME NOW, TINKER. A QUICK D.P. IN THE SEA
MIGHT MAKE US PRONE TO CATCHING INFLUENZA,
AND MEAN THAT MY PIPE WON'T LIGHT, BUT IF
IT'S A SERIOUS MURDER ATTEMPT!

IF YOU NOTICED,
THE CEMENT AROUND
THAT GRILLE HAD BEEN
SCRAPED AND
WEAKENED, TO MAKE
IT EASIER TO FORCE
THE GRILLE OUT. NO
WE WERE MEANT TO
COME OUT VERY
MUCH ALIVE!



WE VE PROBABLY BEEN BROUGHT DOWN
HERE TO DIE. BUT NOT JUST AT ANY TIME
THE KILLER WANTS TO KEEP US AROUND
UNTIL THE MOMENT IS RIGHT FOR
HIM TO STRIKE!

ON, WELL THAT'S
A COMFORT!



SUDDENLY THERE
WAS A KNOCK
AT THE DOOR...

MR. BLAKE SIR, IT'S LOFTS.
MR. HOLLIS WANTS YOU TO
COME AND SEE HIM IN HIS
APARTMENTS.

OF COURSE, LOFTS.
I'LL BE ALONG IN A
MINUTE.

COME OFF IT GUY.
IT MIGHT BE
ANOTHER TRAP.



DESPITE TINKER'S WARNING, BLAKE
WENT TO HOLLIS'S APARTMENT...



HMMM THE DOORS OPEN
AND HOLLIS DOESN'T APPEAR
TO BE HERE.



IN THE TYPEWRITER...
ANOTHER OF HOLLIS'S
THREE LIFES... GOOD
LORD! THE TITLE!



IT'S ABOUT MY DEATH... AND
ACCORDING TO THIS A CROSSBOW
BOY'S AIMED AT MY HEAD
AND I'VE GOT THREE
SECONDS TO
LIVE!

THE TERROR OF
PROLL ISLAND
BY EDGAR HOLLIS
CHAPTER SIX: THE
DEATH OF SEPTEN BLAKE!
Blake, lured into the
rooms of Edgar Hollis
puzzles by the presence
of the man, but finds
Hollis's typewriter
which tells him
to be killed
three seconds

NEXT MANUSCRIPT
WEEK: FOR MURDER!



Sexton Blake

AND THE

TERROR OF TROLL ISLAND!

Part 6

BY BILL HENRY & MIKE DOREY

A WEB OF MURDER AND INTRIGUE IS BEING WEAVED AT TROLL HOUSE, THE HOME OF THRILLER-WRITER EDGAR NOLLIS!

FOUR MURDERS HAVE ALREADY TAKEN PLACE AND, WAITING FOR NOLLIS'S ARRIVAL AT A PRE-ARRANGED MEETING, SEXTON BLAKE DISCOVERS A DOCUMENT WHICH CONFIRMS THAT SOMEONE HAS BEEN KILLED.

BUT HE IS TOO SHOCKED TO REALISE THAT IN FACT HE IS ALREADY STARING DEATH IN THE FACE!

"TERROR OF TROLL ISLAND, CHAPTER SIX - THE DEATH OF SEXTON BLAKE!"

BUT, AS THE DEADLY QUARREL WAS ABOUT TO BE DESPATCHED...

GUV'NOR! GET DOWN!

NOW VERY AMY THAT YOU SHOULD ANNOUNCE YOUR OWN DEATH, BLAKE!

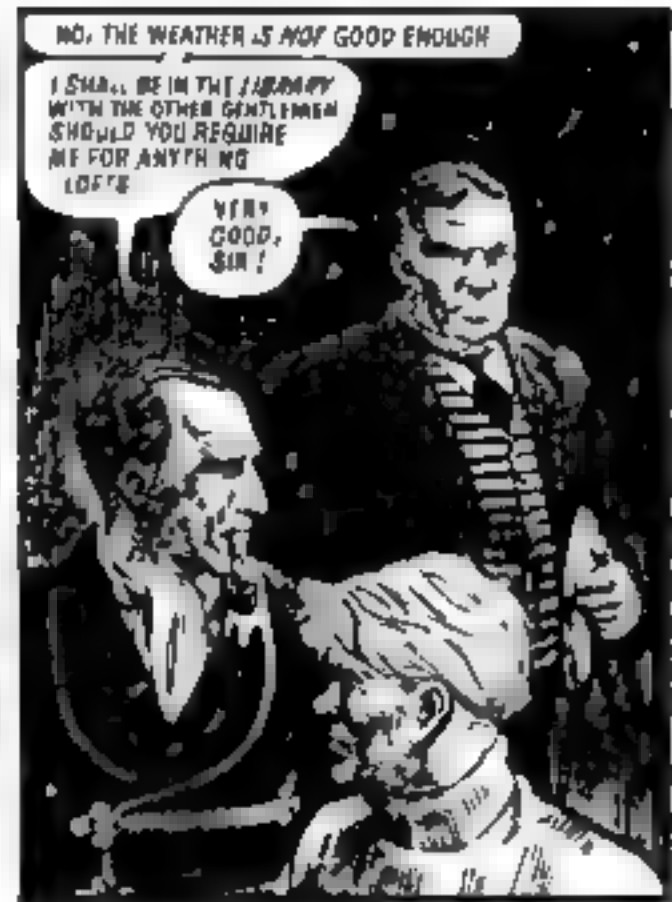
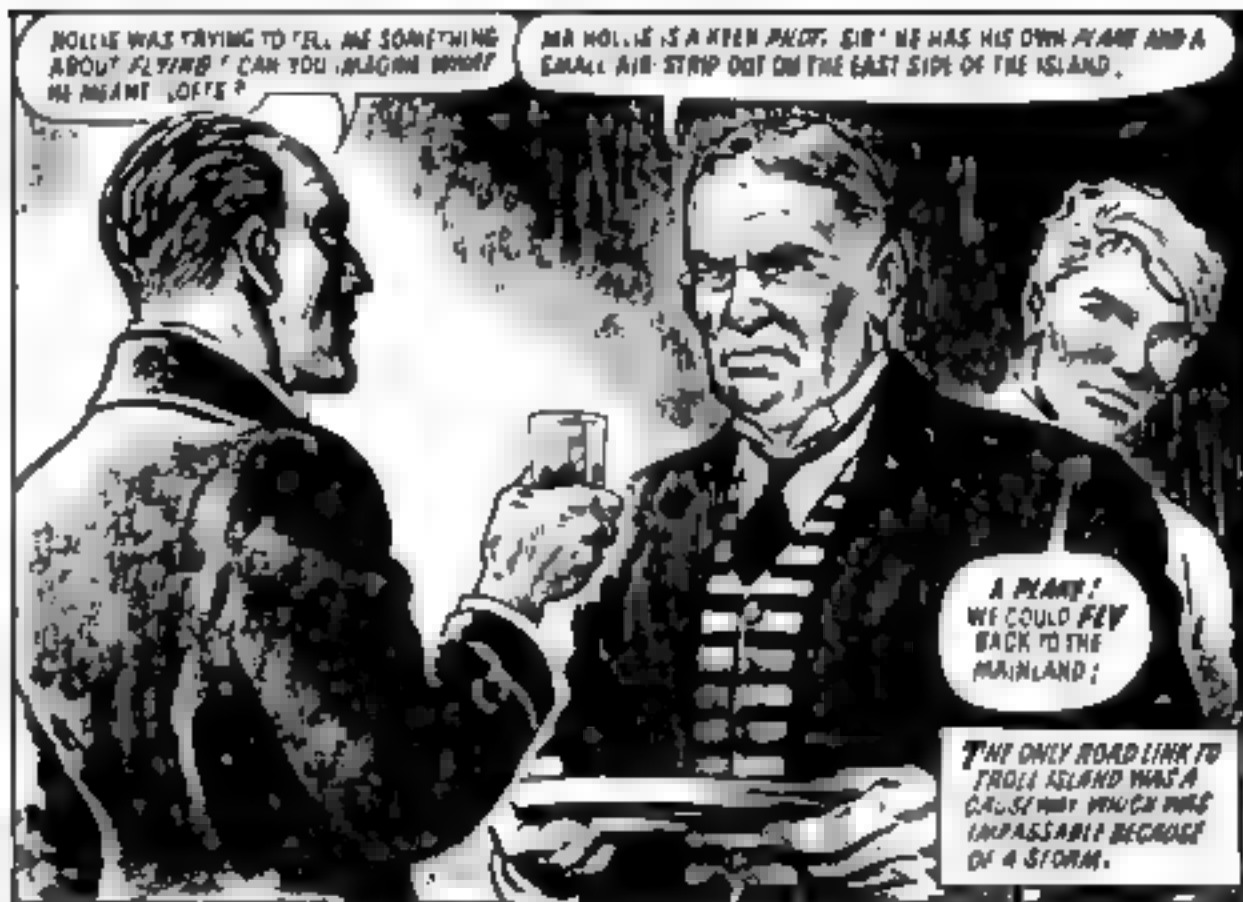
CRAASH!

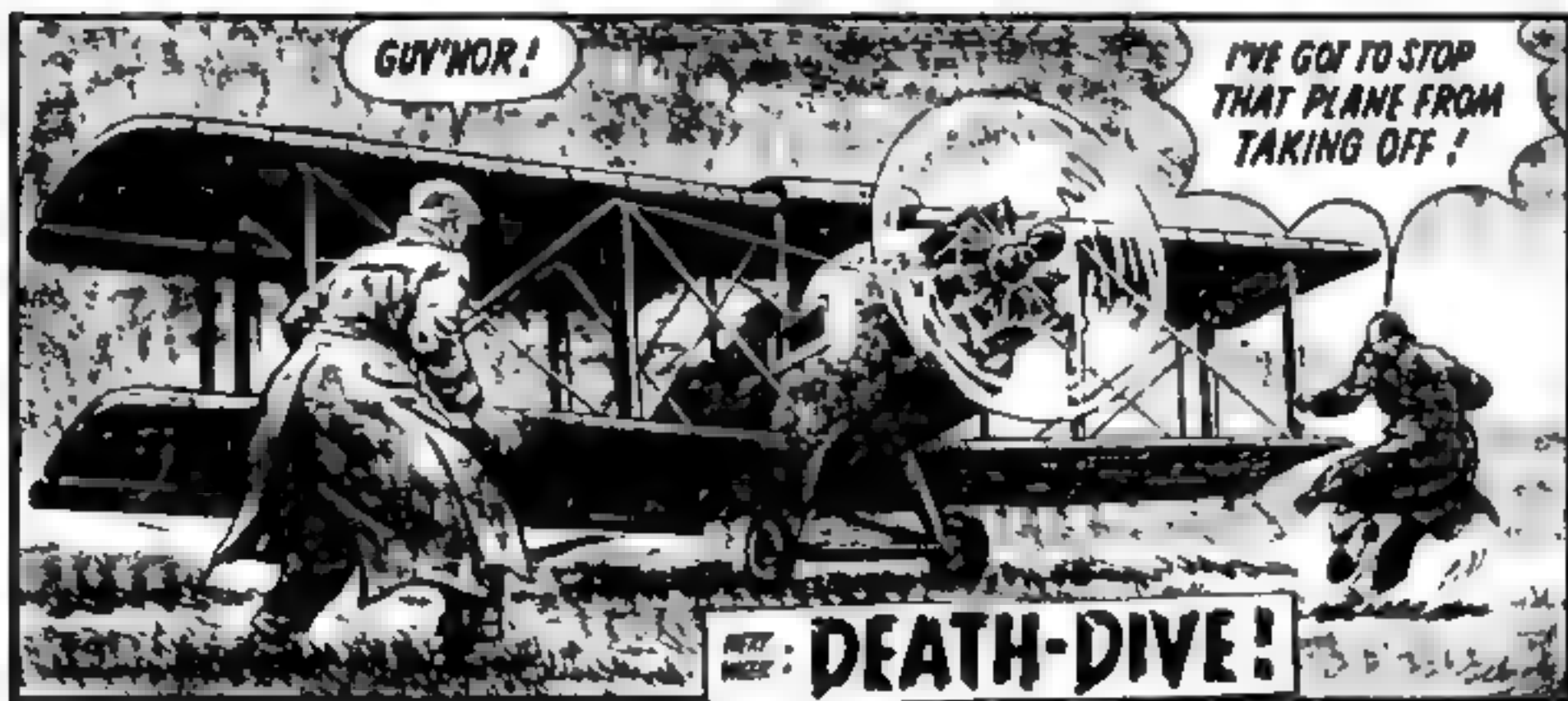
PTHWANNNGG!

THE WARNING FROM HIS ASSISTANT, TINNER, CAME JUST AS BLAKE WAS A SPLIT-SECOND AWAY FROM ETERNITY. BUT IT WAS ENOUGH FOR THE LIGHTNING REACTIONS OF THE GREAT SLEUTH!









HEROES POSTER! * PART 4! * NOW!

No 7

TORNADO

Australia 30c;
Malaysia \$1.00;
New Zealand 30c;
South Africa 30c;

10p

5 MAY 79

ON SALE EVERY MONDAY

**I'M GOING TO
STAMP YOU OUT,
BLAKE! -ONCE
AND FOR ALL!**

IS THIS

*Sexton
Blake's*

**FINAL
FLIGHT?**

**SEE
INSIDE!**





Sexton Blake

AND THE

TERROR OF TROLL ISLAND!

Part 7

BY BILL HENRY & MIKE DOREY

A PHONE CALL WAS SOUGHT BETWIXT BLAKE AND HIS ASSISTANT
FOLLOWING THE "MURDER" OF THE "MURDER" OF THE
DOCTOR WHO WAS A MURDERER'S MURDERER WHO WAS
THAT HE HAD THE MAN WHO WAS IN BLAKE EVEN BLAKE
HAD HIM. HIS OWN LIFE THREATENED

BLAKE STOOD IN THE HALLWAY OF THE
DOCTOR WHO WAS A MURDERER'S MURDERER WHO WAS
THAT HE HAD THE MAN WHO WAS IN BLAKE EVEN BLAKE
HAD HIM. HIS OWN LIFE THREATENED

IT WAS THE LAST
THAT HE HAD THE
DOCTOR WHO WAS
A MURDERER'S
MURDERER WHO WAS
THAT HE HAD THE
MAN WHO WAS IN
BLAKE EVEN BLAKE
HAD HIM. HIS OWN
LIFE THREATENED



NO GUY'S
TOO LATE
TO BE
THE
DOCTOR
WHO WAS
A MURDERER'S
MURDERER WHO WAS
THAT HE HAD THE
MAN WHO WAS IN
BLAKE EVEN BLAKE
HAD HIM. HIS OWN
LIFE THREATENED

THE DOCTOR WHO WAS
A MURDERER'S MURDERER
WHO WAS THAT HE HAD THE
MAN WHO WAS IN BLAKE
EVEN BLAKE HAD HIM.
HIS OWN LIFE
THREATENED

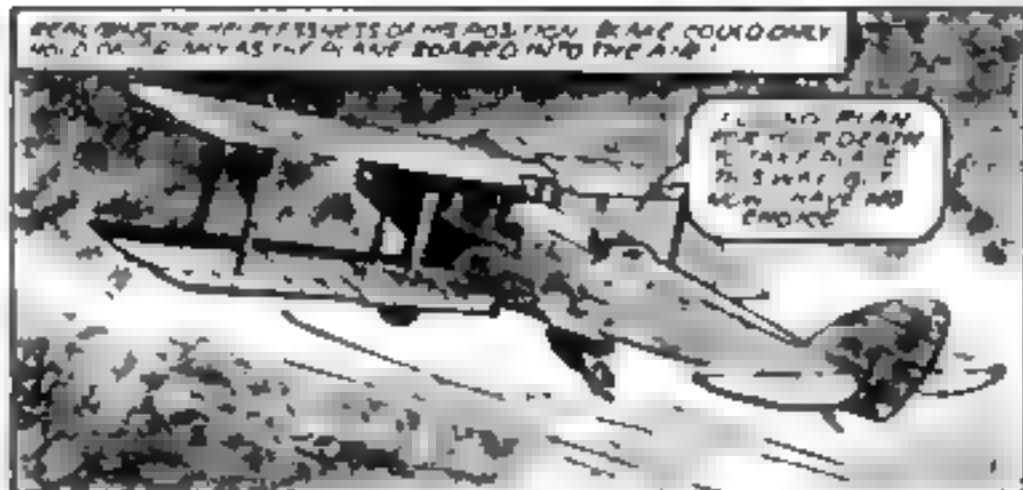
THE DOCTOR WHO WAS
A MURDERER'S MURDERER
WHO WAS THAT HE HAD THE
MAN WHO WAS IN BLAKE
EVEN BLAKE HAD HIM.
HIS OWN LIFE
THREATENED



DOCTOR WHO WAS
A MURDERER'S MURDERER
WHO WAS THAT HE HAD THE
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EVEN BLAKE HAD HIM.
HIS OWN LIFE
THREATENED

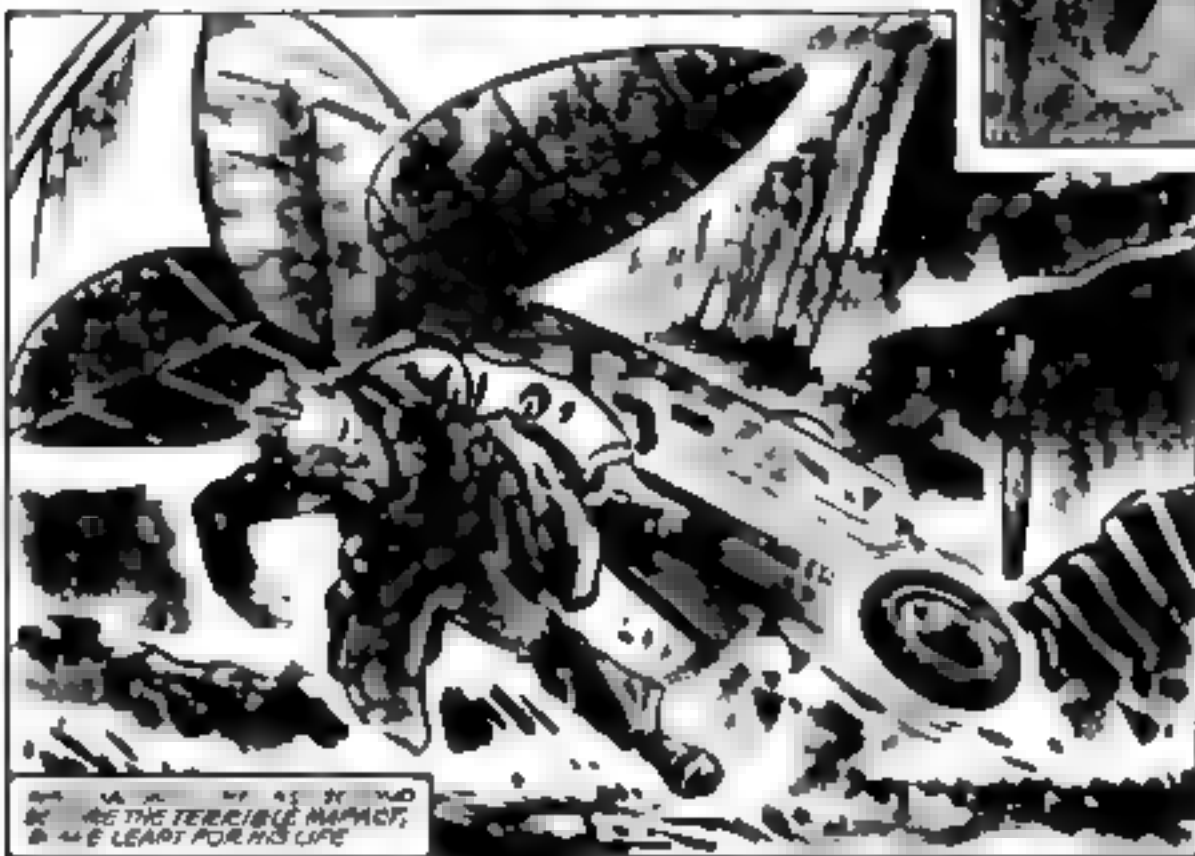
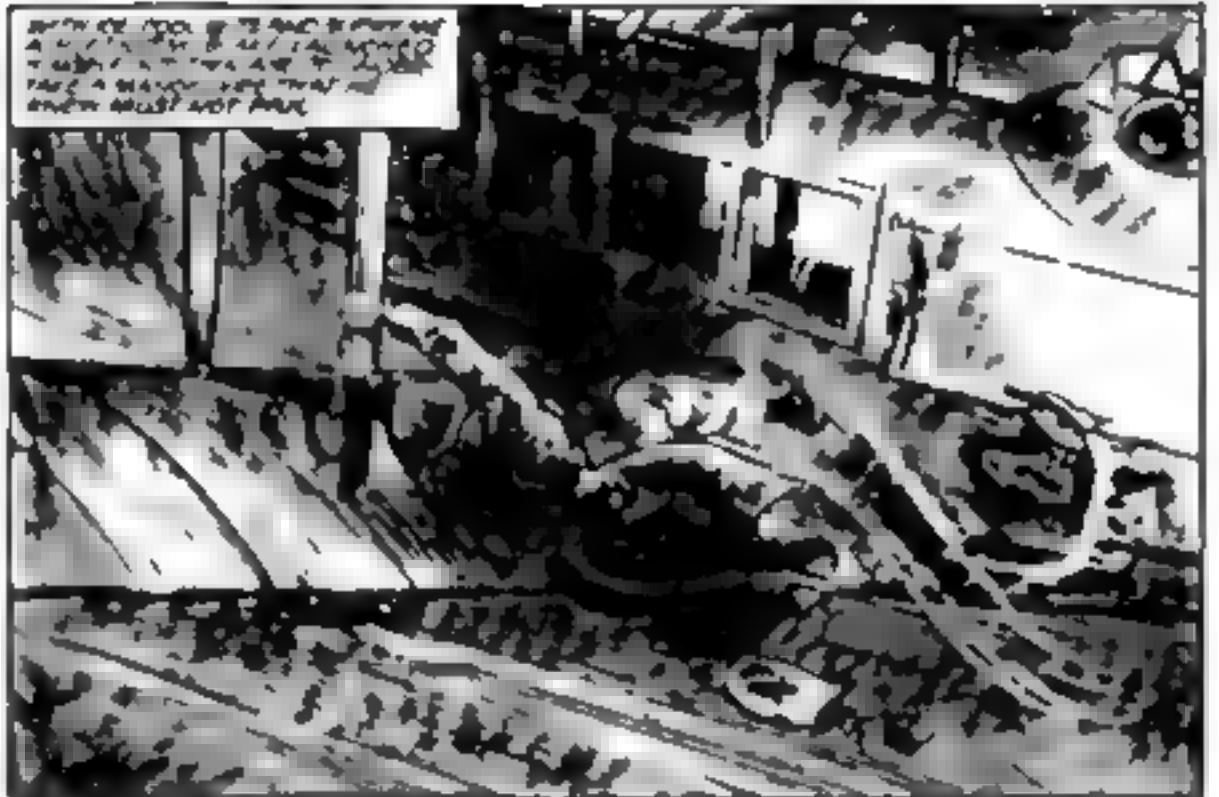
DOCTOR WHO WAS
A MURDERER'S MURDERER
WHO WAS THAT HE HAD THE
MAN WHO WAS IN BLAKE
EVEN BLAKE HAD HIM.
HIS OWN LIFE
THREATENED

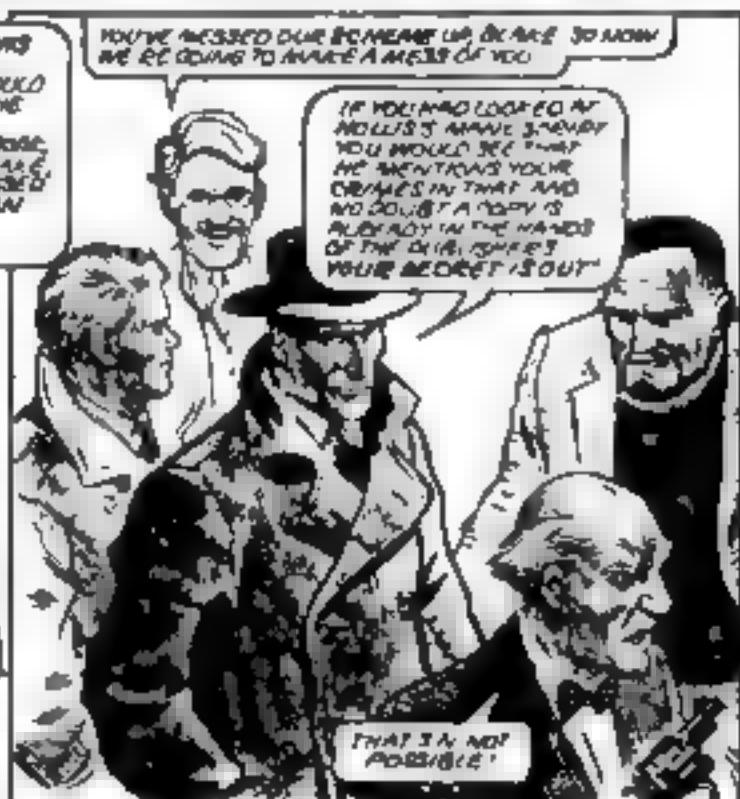
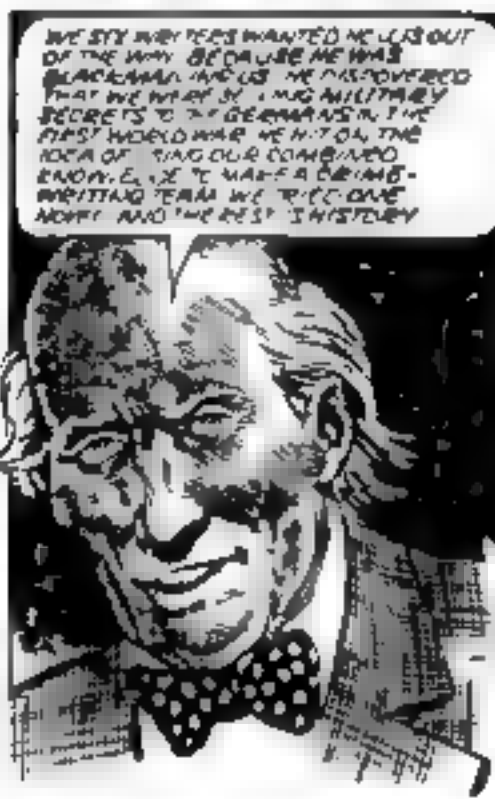
DOCTOR WHO WAS
A MURDERER'S MURDERER
WHO WAS THAT HE HAD THE
MAN WHO WAS IN BLAKE
EVEN BLAKE HAD HIM.
HIS OWN LIFE
THREATENED



DOCTOR WHO WAS
A MURDERER'S MURDERER
WHO WAS THAT HE HAD THE
MAN WHO WAS IN BLAKE
EVEN BLAKE HAD HIM.
HIS OWN LIFE
THREATENED

DOCTOR WHO WAS
A MURDERER'S MURDERER
WHO WAS THAT HE HAD THE
MAN WHO WAS IN BLAKE
EVEN BLAKE HAD HIM.
HIS OWN LIFE
THREATENED





IN HIS HASTE TO READ THE MANUSCRIPT, SALT HAD NEGLECTED TO KEEP HIS GUN TRAINED ON THE DETECTIVES. BLAKE SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY, AND WITH THE SPEED OF A PANTHER...



SO THAT JUST LEAVES YOU, GOODALL, MASTER OF ARMOURY AND WEAPONS, WHO WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO A SPOT OF VIOLENCE.



TINKER WAS ALSO QUICK TO REACT TO THE SITUATION.



WITH THE STORM SUBSIDED, GOFF WAS ABLE TO BRING THE POLICE ACROSS FROM THE MAINLAND...

SO THEY FACE TRIAL FOR THEIR ORIGINAL CRIMES, AND A SIGHT MORE ON TOP FOR TRYING TO KEEP THINGS SECRET!







VICTOR DRAGO: A.K.A. SEXTON BLAKE

BY KARL STOCK

It's BEEN EXACTLY fifty years, give or take a few months, since Sexton Blake last appeared in comic series form, with the strip which ran in IPC's *Valiant* comic between January 1968 and May 1970 being an overt tie-in with the Laurence Payne-starring ITV television show of the time.

'The stories were awful,' says Blake expert Mark Hodder of these *Valiant*-era tales. 'They were like *Scooby Doo* – haunted castles with secret passages and traps, and the ghost at the end is revealed to be the host's cousin, or something like that. Very silly, and not very good.'

Yet this ignominious entry in the mountainous, three-quarter-century first gasp of Blake's publishing canon wasn't

the last gasp for the character on the comic strip page. In 1979, in the wake of the bustling revival of London-based comic publisher IPC's fortunes brought about by the triple threat launch of *Battle*, *Action* and *2000 AD*, a new title named *Tornado* sought to return Sexton Blake to strip form – until, at the very last minute, the series was mysteriously renamed 'Victor Drago', and all mention of the Blake connection was hastily edited out.

'He very obviously was originally Sexton Blake,' says Hodder of Drago's link to the longstanding character. 'For a start, he looks exactly like Eric Parker's rendition (of Blake). His assistant Spencer was very obviously Blake's assistant Tinker,

and his bloodhound Brutus was clearly Blake's bloodhound Pedro. In addition, Drago's car was called the Silver Lady, but in one panel he refers to it as the Grey Panther – which is Sexton Blake's car. Its number plate is even 'SB192'. All the clues are there.'

Among Hodder and others in the Blake fan community, two theories have existed about why this sudden change occurred. The first is that editorial suddenly had a change of heart and decided that the adventures of an Edwardian detective were out of step with a comic landscape in which



Tornado, 1979, p. 8

dystopian antihero Judge Dredd was beginning to make a big impression; it's an unlikely one, given that altering the names of a few characters wouldn't change the fundamental nature of a strip which had already been written and drawn.

The other theory – which turns out to be the truthful one, having spoken to as many of those involved as possible – was that an issue with the rights wasn't discovered until it was almost too late. There's no doubt that the change of title caused anger and friction among those involved at the time, although, with more than four decades under the bridge, the opening seven-part by writer Chris Lowder and artist Mike Dorey (which is reprinted within these pages in its entirety) is a thrillingly confident entry in *Sexton Blake* lore.

'After *Starlord* (2000 AD's sci-fi stablemate, which folded after a few months, I was told to go and make another comic, which we gave the working title of *Heroes*,' says *Tornado's* editor Kelvin Gosnell, as the IPC staffer who had made the suggestion that launching a sci-fi comic to tie in with *Star Wars* release would be a good idea, he now had the imminent release of *Superman: The Movie* in his sights.

'The idea was that each of the characters in the title would be a hero, we had a superhero character and so on,' he continues. 'I can't fully remember all the details, but I believe Chris Lowder came to me and said, "you do realise that *Sexton Blake* is about

to be on telly?" If you've got the rights to do it, it would be a good idea.' Now I knew and liked *Sexton Blake*, and I thought this would be quite a nice idea – why not bring back a classic character, as well as the new stuff we were turning out? I went to (publisher John) Sanders and asked, do we still have the rights to do it as a publication? He said "yes, yes, of course, no problem, go ahead with it."

Neither Lowder nor Sanders were available for comment, so what went on from their perspectives can only be surmised from others' accounts. As Gosnell has it, however, Lowder was a 'sort of professor-level academic' of not just the history of *Sexton Blake*, but of a wide range of pulp and detective fiction of the same era. So for him, to script *Blake* in a comic strip – a field of writing which Lowder was prolific in throughout the 1970s, including contributions to the *Judge Dredd* and *Dan Dare* mythologies – was apparently a job of the 'bucket list' variety.

'People don't realise it today, because our attention span is little more than fifteen bloody minutes,' says Gosnell, 'but from the time (*Sexton Blake's* story) got taken over by *Union Jack* magazine, as it was then, it took off enormously. It was much bigger than James Bond, and there were many stories written by some pretty big writers. Chris was very keen to do it, and he did a brilliant script which went out to Mike Dorey to draw, who also did a fantastic job.'



Tornado, issue 8



NEXT MOMENT - THE IMPOSSIBLE!



Toronto, June 8

At this point, Dorey's gritty, shadow-heavy work had made him one of the most distinctive and well-used artists in the IPC stable. Starting out earlier in the 1970s with Dundee's DC Thomson, he was initially hired by editor Pat Mills for *Action* comic's war strip *Hellman of Hummer Force*, before moving on to stories like *Invasion!* and *Ro-Busters* in *2000 AD*.

'They did ask me if I'd be interested in doing some Judge Dredd, laughs Dorey today, in reminiscing mood. 'I thought it was going to be a space story so I said no, because I didn't fancy doing that – and look how that one turned out!'

Dorey also confirms that Drago was absolutely intended to be Blake at the point when he came aboard – the character was one he was aware of, although the real expertise with Blake's style and origins all came courtesy of Lowder. 'Chris sent me loads of photocopies of the old *Union Jack* magazine, with Eric Parker's artwork in it,' says Dorey. 'He was very, very enthusiastic, and his scripts are very detailed as well. Which I don't normally like – the less a writer puts in, the better I like it, because you're free to interpret stuff. But Chris's scripts were very specific.'

As evidenced by the header image of 'Drago' at the top

of his story, which was directly influenced by Parker's own representation of Blake, the artist was Dorey's key influence on Victor Drago. 'Parker's stuff is fantastic, I think, he's a really good artist,' says Dorey. 'He did lots of really good shadows, and he had a really loose, bold line, which I liked – looser and bolder than mine. His stuff is so dynamic, his pictures looked intriguing and different, and you wanted to read the story.'

'I really enjoyed doing Victor Drago,' he continues. 'It was quite labour-intensive, as you probably realise, there was a lot of hatching and darks in it. The first Drago I did was *Terror of Troll Island*, which was a bit like an Agatha Christie in a way – mysterious house in the fog, all that stuff. So many people say I do gritty, dark artwork, and I think it really suited that story. Normally in war stories I'd do really heroic characters and stocky Nazis and stuff, but in Drago you actually had to do some real characters, which I enjoyed – and I also enjoyed drawing him, he's a nice figure, very angular and tall.'

So what exactly went wrong? Why was Blake so unceremoniously dispatched, and Drago drafted in? 'We'd processed the strip along, it was all lettered-up and ready to go,

recalls Gosnell, and then a few days before it was due to go to press as *Sexton Blake*, John Sanders called me in and said, "you can't do it" He wouldn't tell me why, just that I wasn't allowed to do it. We produced it as *Sexton Blake*, and then three or four days before it was due to go out to press, the whole damn lot had to be changed.'

Was the decision really Sanders', or did it come from someone higher up? 'I can't answer that with any accuracy, because it was the way of doing things, it was always shrouded in secrecy, says Gosnell. 'You were never allowed to know what was going on. I discovered later that it was because they'd actually sold the bloody publication rights to the TV company! I found this out from various other sources... I think it was our lawyer who told me that was the problem, that the rights had been resold to someone else.' (presumably this is in reference to the 1978 BBC One six-part *Sexton Blake and the Demon God*, produced by former *Doctor Who* producer Barry Letts).

'Chris wasn't happy, because he was the real *Sexton Blake* fan,' says Dorey. 'I mean, I was annoyed, but then, you know, I was getting paid to do it... they told me about it because I was getting paid to change all the lettering and stuff. But I thought it was a bit pathetic, really, because it was so obviously *Sexton Blake*.'

For Gosnell, the *Blake/Drago* event was the tip of the iceberg, at this point. 'The title of *Heroes* itself got changed to **Tornado**,' he says. 'Which was nonsense. You know, the whole idea of doing a heroes collection seemed perfectly valid to me, but then at the last minute, about the same time as *Victor Drago* came into existence, *Heroes* became **Tornado**.'

Gosnell came up with the new title himself, after the change was demanded, by remembering the only military aircraft he could think of whose name – after **Vulcan**, **Victor** and **Valiant** hadn't been taken by a comic. 'When spelled backwards, **Tornado** comes out as 'Odd an' Rot', which I thought was a really rather decent comment on the way that IPC ran its business.'

A writer of many pseudonyms, Lowder hasn't actually stated why he used the pen-name 'Bill Henry' on the first *Drago* series, but it isn't hard to fathom why 'Chris got very pissed off with the whole thing, and hasn't spoken to me since,' says Gosnell. 'Which is a great shame, because it wasn't my bloody fault, I did everything I could to make it work – he and I got on very well, I would say we were friends as well as colleagues, but because of this I've never spoken to him again. And I'd love to.'

Although *Drago* ran throughout all 22 of **Tornado's** issues, including the three-part *China-Town Terror* by Dorey and veteran writer Frank Pepper, it had for the most part mutated into a prose story with illustrations (the creators of which were largely unknown, although Gosnell mentions that staffer Roy



Tornado, issue 9

Preston – who apparently coined the name 'Victor Drago' – may have had some involvement).

Lowder continued to write comics for some years, including *Thor's Future Shocks* in *2000 AD*; Dorey left the industry in the 1980s and became a prolific storyboard artist for the television advertising industry; and a clearly disenchanted Gosnell departed IPC editorial before long, although his scripts for *2000 AD's* comic adaptation of sci-fi author Harry Harrison's series of Stainless Steel Rat books gave him cult kudos in the 1980s.

'With *Victor Drago* in **Tornado**, it harks back to the golden era (of *Sexton Blake*), which was the 1920s,' says Hodder. 'He looks like Sherlock Holmes, and the pre-1956 Eric Parker rendition looked quite Holmesian. It's much better than the *Valiant* comics, which are pretty poor... in fact, of all the comic strip renditions of *Sexton Blake*, the two I hold in highest regard are the early *Knockout* comics and **Tornado**. Even though **Tornado** says 'Victor Drago', it IS *Sexton Blake*.'

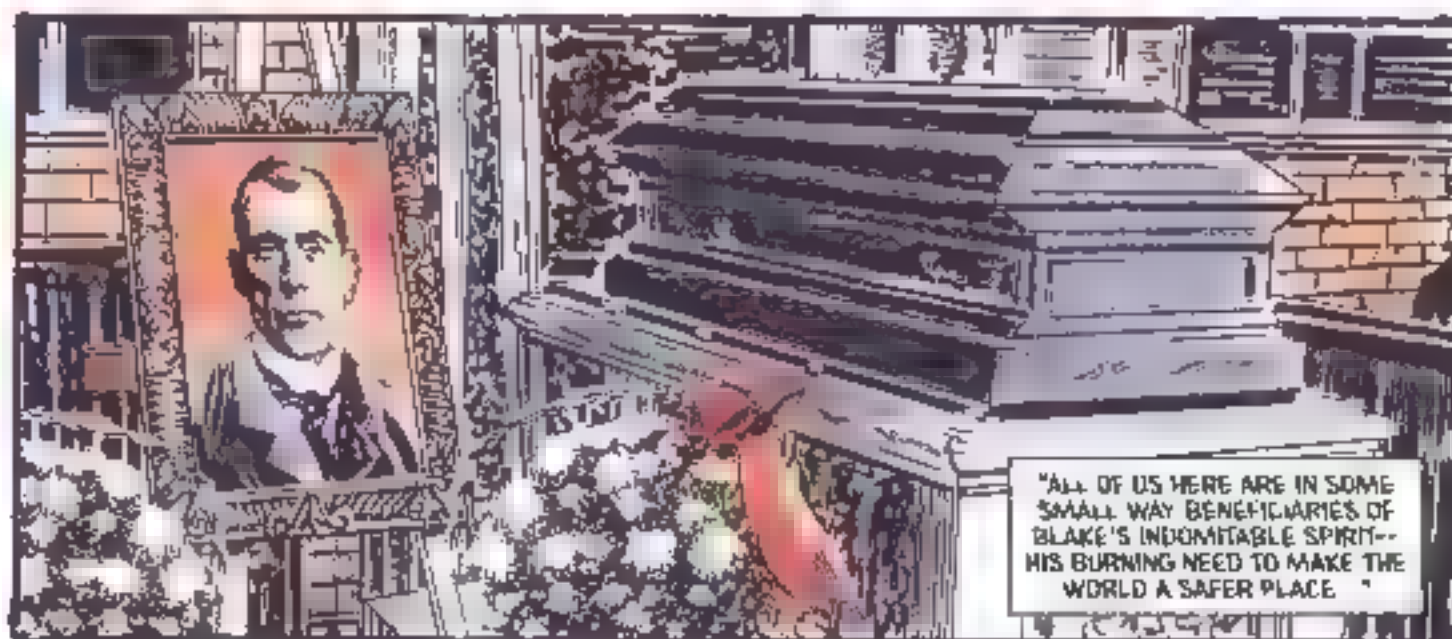
'I think it's one of the best-ever picture strip stories made in this country, says Gosnell, of the first *Victor Drago* seven-partner – the *Sexton Blake* which never was – now. 'When I say that, I'm comparing it to (Judge Dredd's co-creator Carlos) Ezquerra and Mick McMahon and everything else on *2000 AD*. It was so beautifully done, everything was perfect, and I think Mike Dorey did his best job on it. Fantastic stuff.' Readers can judge for themselves when they read the reprint of it elsewhere in these pages.

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF SEXTON BLAKE

Script: George Mann
Art: Jimmy Brown
Letters: Susan Howland

LONDON,
1923.

"WE COME TOGETHER
TODAY TO CELEBRATE THE
LIFE OF OUR DEAR FRIEND
AND COLLEAGUE."





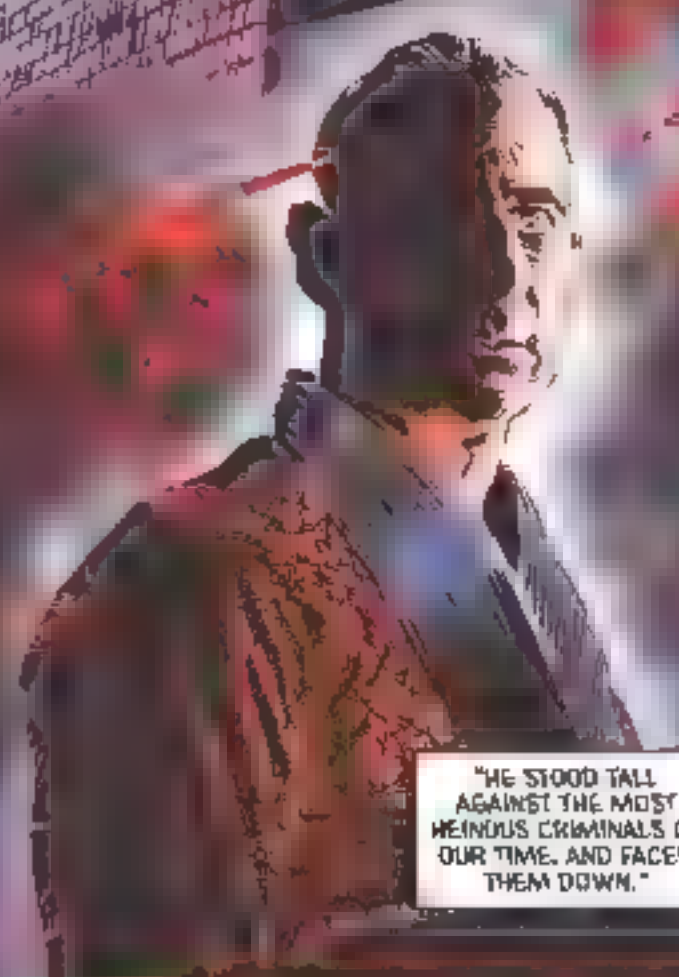
BLAKE
WAS A MAN OF
EXTRAORDINARY
DETERMINATION.



"NO MATTER IF
HE WERE CROSSING
THE ANDES.



"...OR AT HOME HERE IN
LONDON, HE ALWAYS PUT
THE WELFARE OF OTHERS
BEFORE HIS OWN.



"HE STOOD TALL
AGAINST THE MOST
HEINOUS CRIMINALS OF
OUR TIME, AND FACED
THEM DOWN."



NONE MORE
SO THAN THE SO-
CALLED "CHESSMAN"
THE DESPICABLE
AUGUSTUS
PARGETER.

"THE MAN WHO WOULD
EVENTUALLY LEAD MY
FRIEND TO HIS DEATH."

QUICKLY,
TINKER-
HE'S GETTING
AWAY!

I'M
DOING MY
DAMNEDEST,
BOSS!

HOLD ON
TIGHT!

SKREEEE



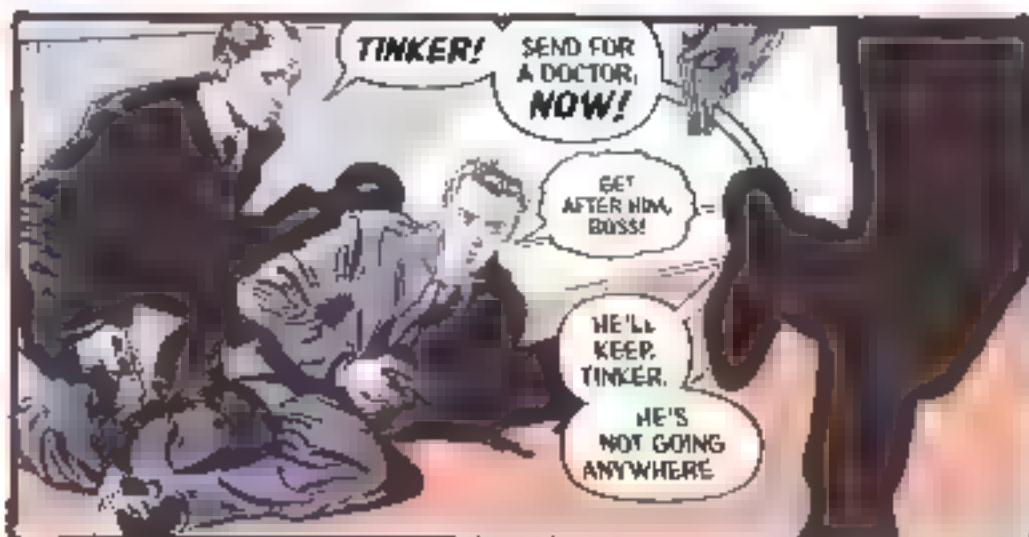
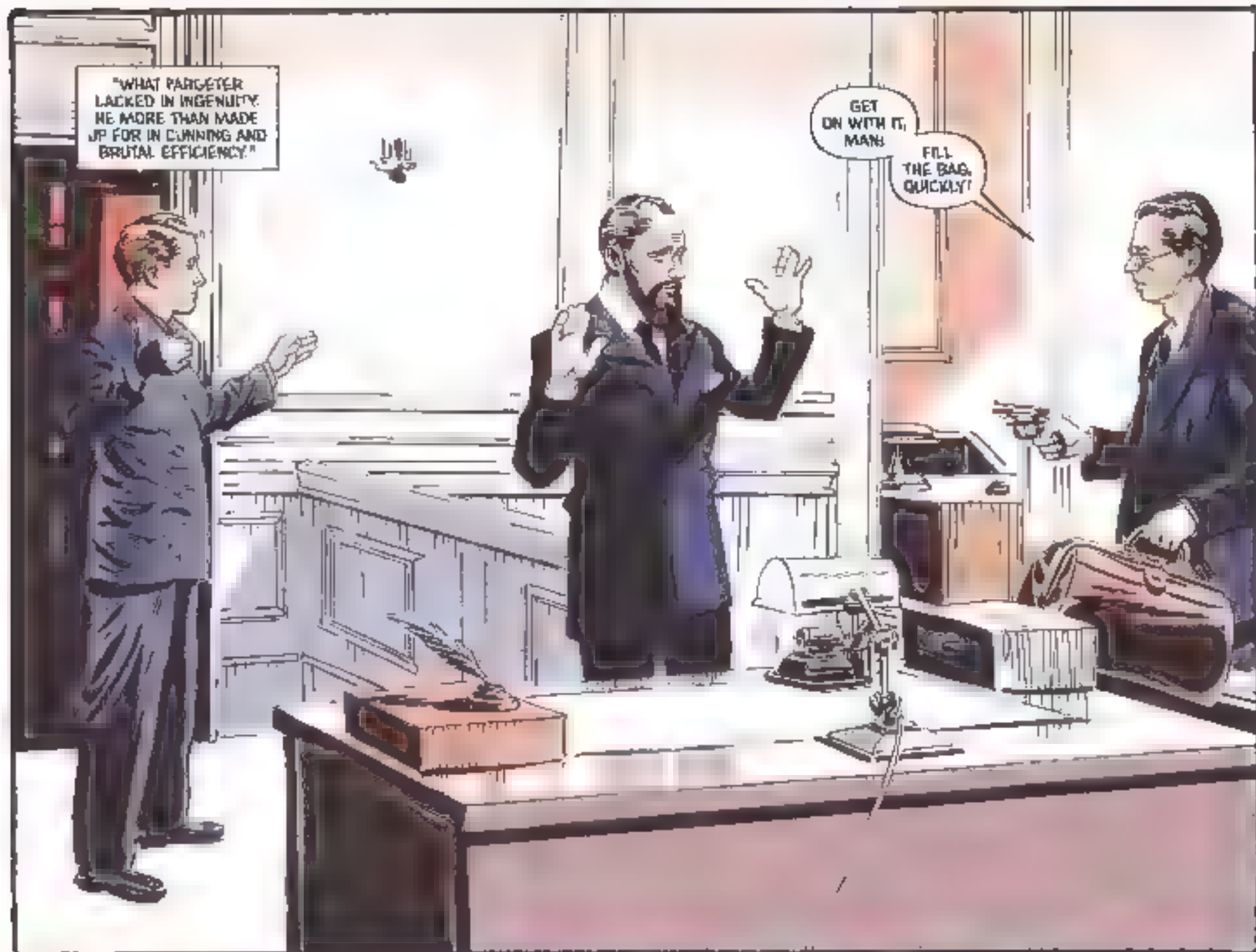
VRRRUMMMM

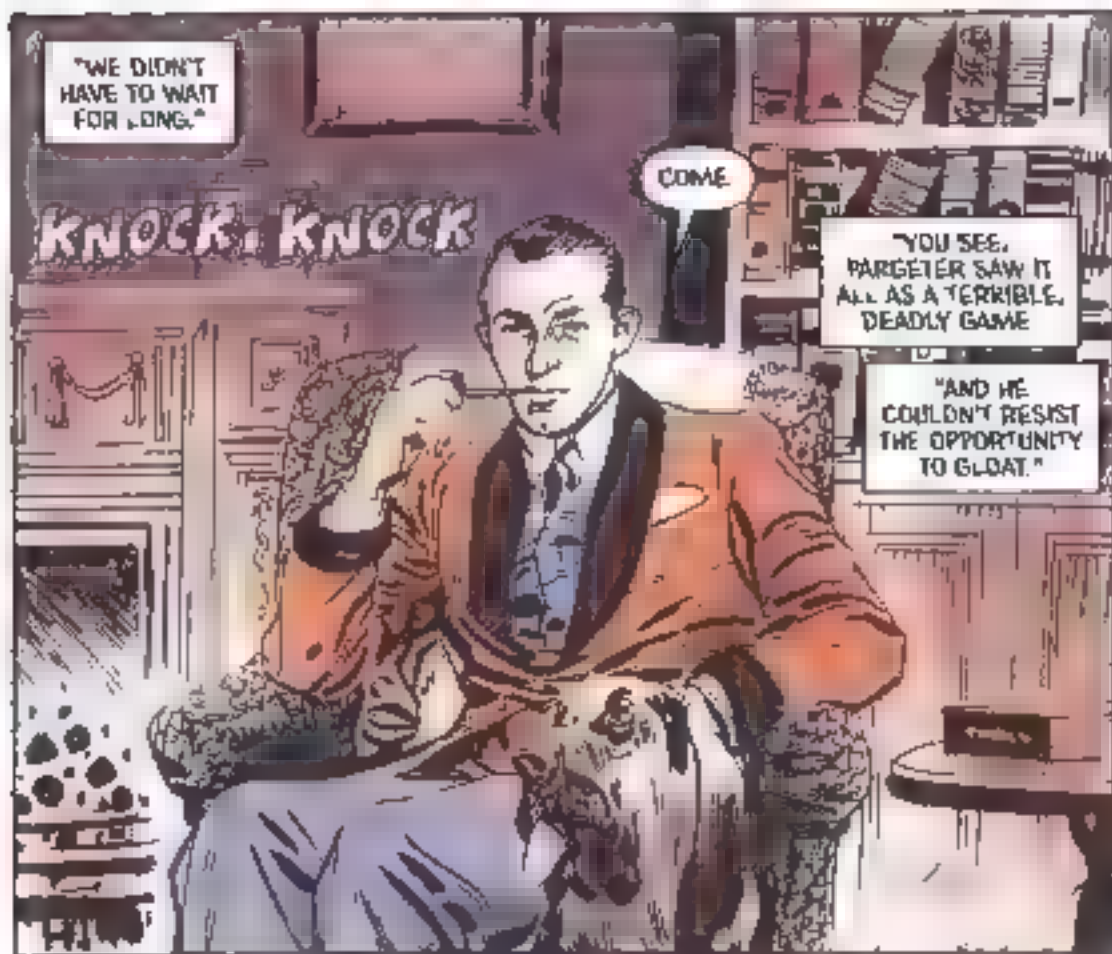
THAT'S
IT, TINKER.
HOLD HER
STEADY.

...STEADY...

DAMN!

VREEEE!!!





"WE DIDN'T HAVE TO WAIT FOR LONG."

COME

"YOU SEE, FARGETER SAW IT ALL AS A TERRIBLE, DEADLY GAME"

"AND HE COULDN'T RESIST THE OPPORTUNITY TO GLOAT."



FOUND THIS ON THE DOORMAT. THERE'S NO STAMP OR POSTMARK

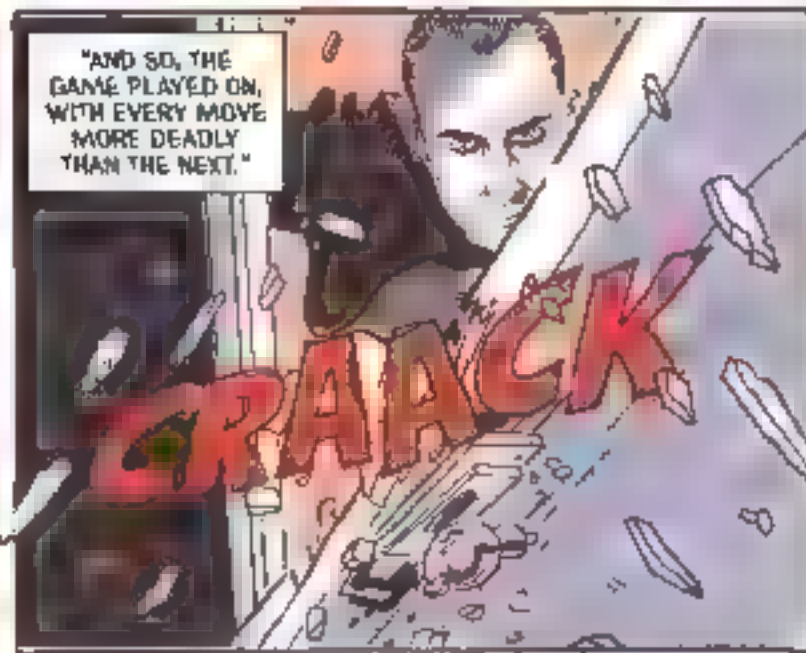
AM, YES, I'VE RATHER BEEN EXPECTING THIS.

YOU THINK IT'S FROM HIM?



OH, I'M CERTAIN OF IT, TINKER.

IT SEEMS OUR MR. FARGETER IS ANXIOUS TO DECLARE HIS NEXT MOVE



"AND SO, THE GAME PLAYED ON, WITH EVERY MOVE MORE DEADLY THAN THE NEXT."



REMAIN PERFECTLY STILL, YOUR HIGHNESS.

THE SLIGHTEST MOVE COULD TRIGGER THE DEVICE

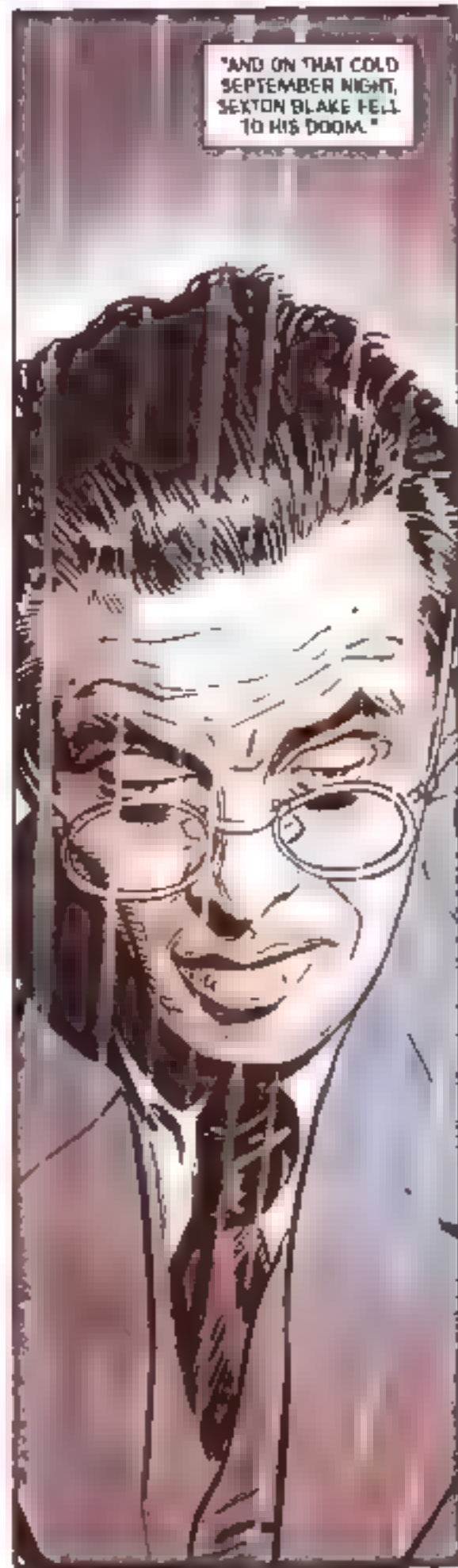


NOW TELL ME--WHERE IS HE?

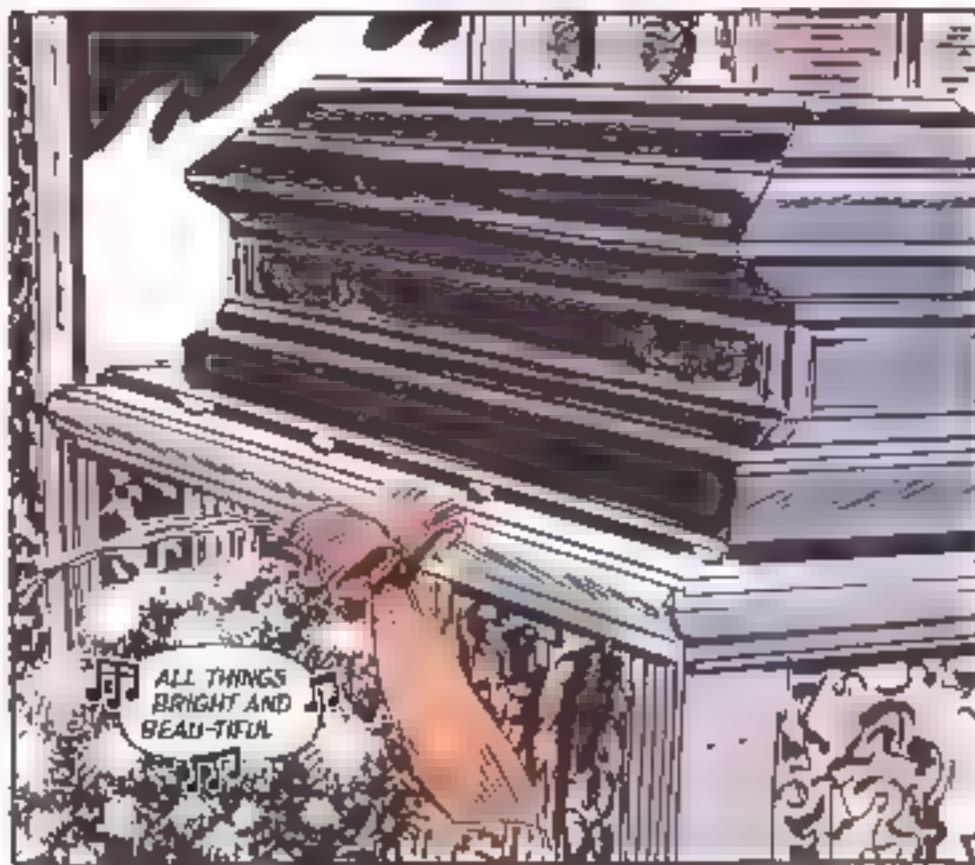


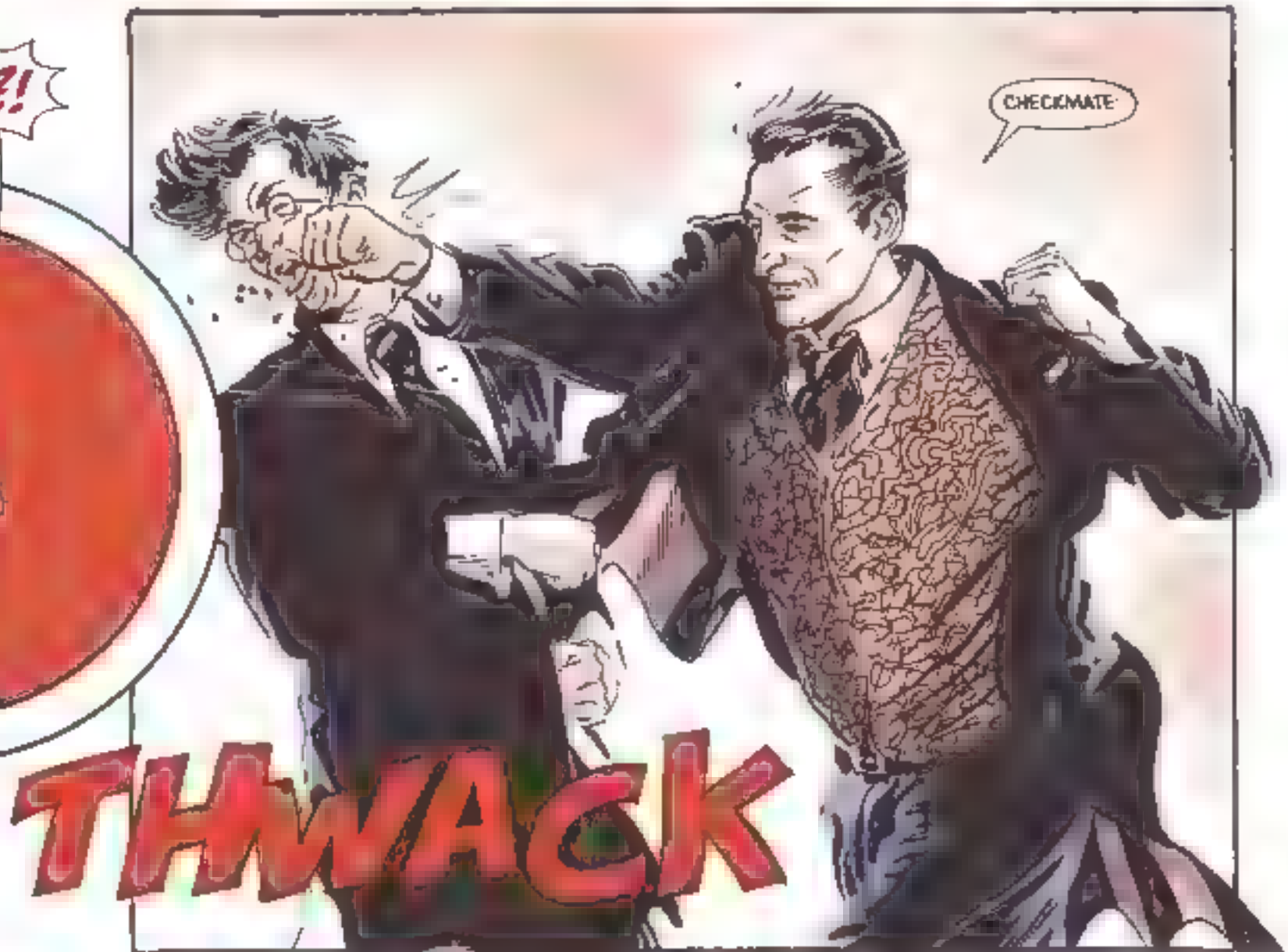
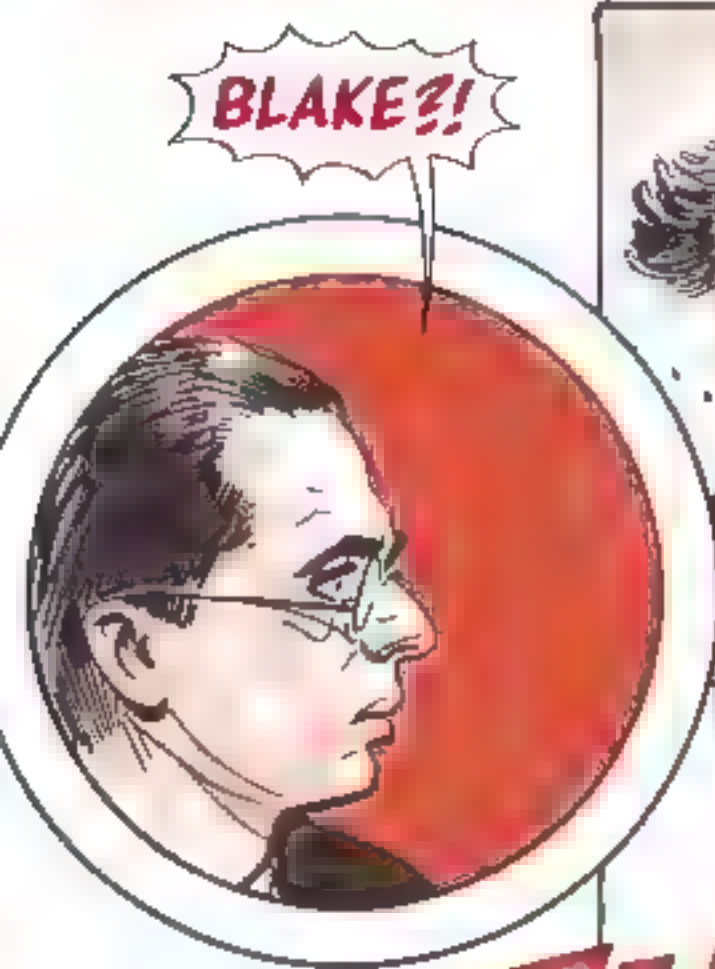


"BUT LITTLE DID ANY OF US IMAGINE TARGETER WAS RIGHT."



"AND ON THAT COLD SEPTEMBER NIGHT, SEXTON BLAKE FELL TO HIS DOOM."







A CLEVER MOVE BLAKE—BUT KNOW THAT I NEVER FALL FOR THE SAME TRAP TWICE

THERE'LL BE ANOTHER GAME YET.

DON'T WORRY, PARGETER—WHERE YOU'RE GOING, YOU'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO PRACTICE

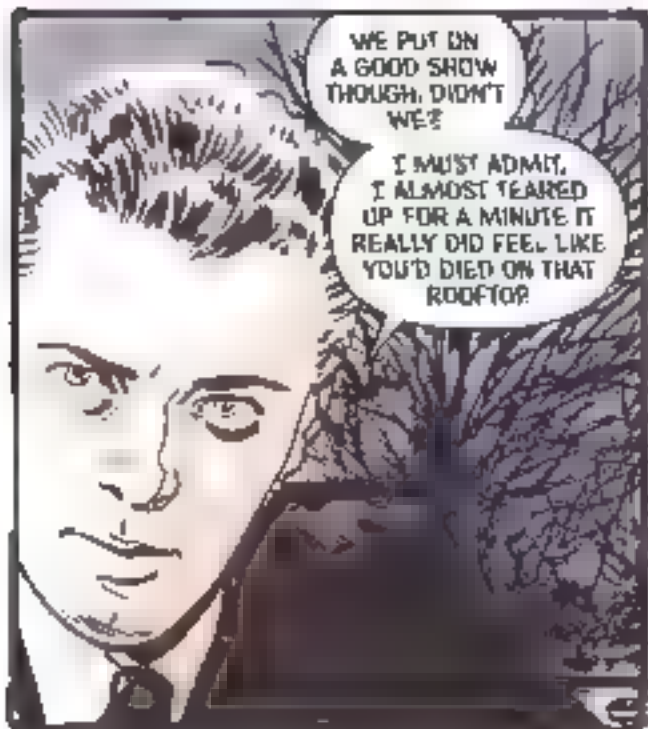


SO IT WORKED THEN, BOSS!

I KNEW PARGETER WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO RESIST COMING TO YOUR "FUNERAL" TO GLOAT.

INDEED, TINKER.

THOUGH I DARESAY THAT WON'T BE THE LAST WE'LL SEE OF OUR FRIEND THE "CHESSMAN"



WE PUT ON A GOOD SHOW THOUGH, DIDN'T WE?

I MUST ADMIT, I ALMOST TEARED UP FOR A MINUTE IT REALLY DID FEEL LIKE YOU'D DIED ON THAT ROOFTOP



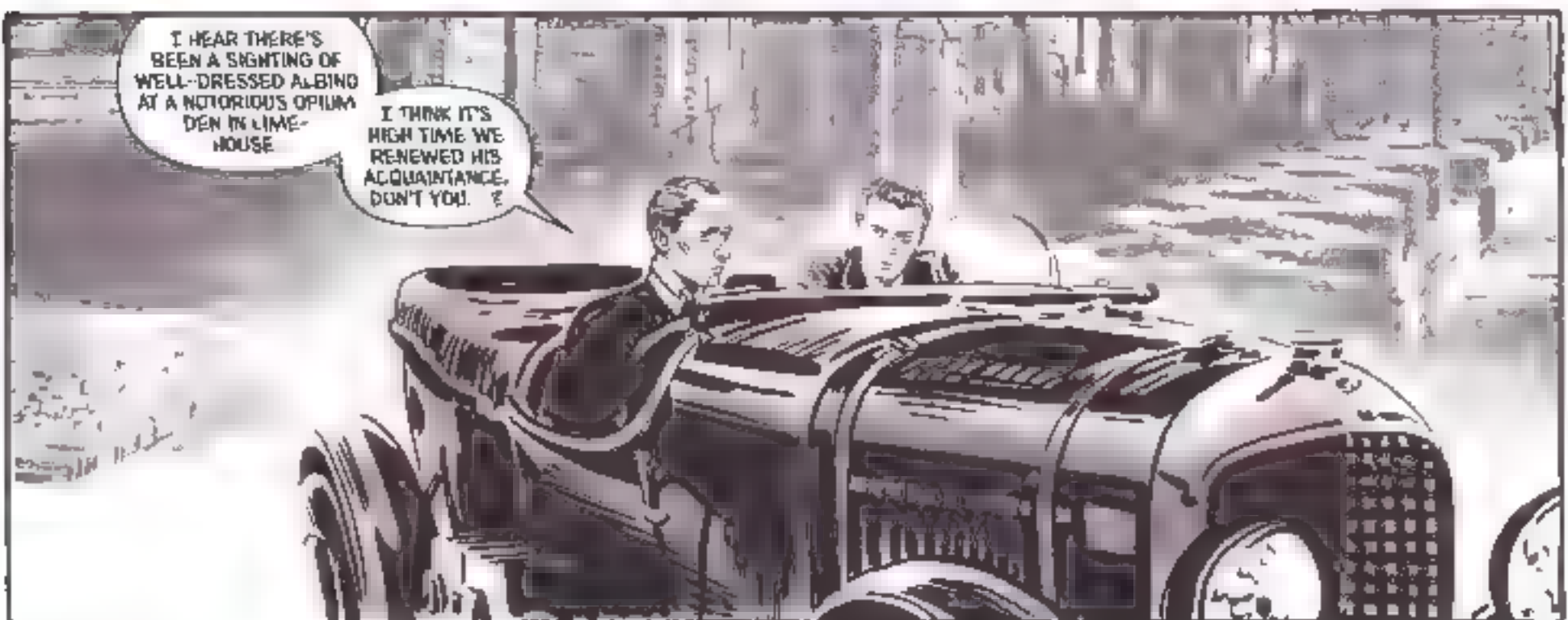
YES, A JOB WELL DONE. ALTHOUGH I FEAR YOU HAVE A TENDENCY TOWARDS THE SENTIMENTAL. TINKER YOUR SPEECH WAS PERHAPS A LITTLE EXAGGERATED.



I'M JUST GLAD YOU WERE AROUND TO HEAR IT, BOSS.

I MEANT WHAT I SAID—I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D DO WITHOUT OUR LITTLE ADVENTURES

SPEAKING OF WHICH, TINKER.



I HEAR THERE'S BEEN A SIGHTING OF WELL-DRESSED ALBINO AT A NOTORIOUS OPIUM DEN IN LIME-HOUSE

I THINK IT'S HIGH TIME WE RENEWED HIS ACQUAINTANCE, DON'T YOU?



HOW SEXTON BLAKE CAME BACK FROM THE DEAD

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE CREATIVE TEAM

BY KARL STOCK

'I CAME ACROSS Sexton Blake about twelve years ago,' says author George Mann, whose prolific career includes novel-writing in the worlds of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Who, as well as developing his own properties with the *Newbury & Hobbes* and *Ghosts* series. The editor of two collections of Blake stories for Snowbooks a decade ago, he becomes – in the

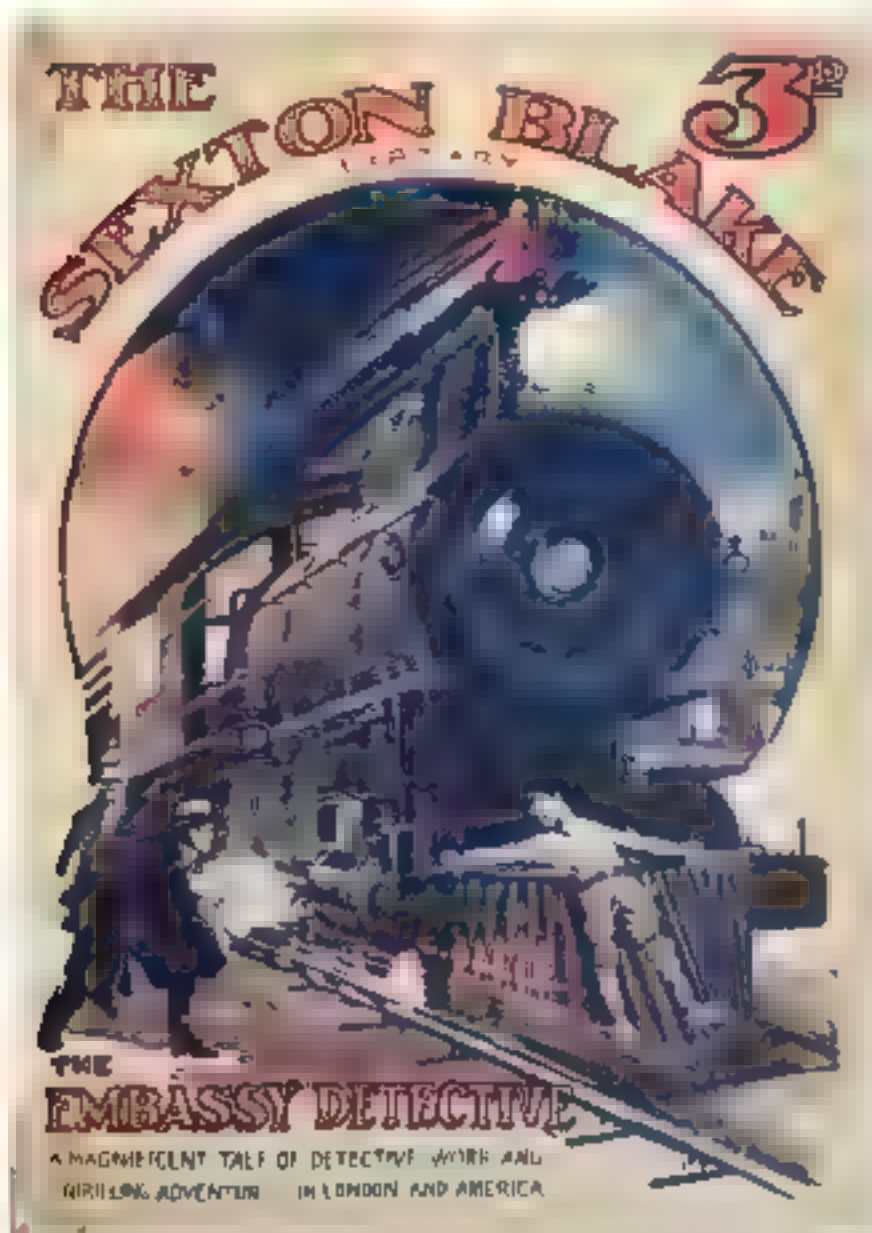
publication you're holding right now – the first writer to pen a Sexton Blake comic strip adventure (under the character's own name) since the brief run in *Valiant* ended exactly fifty years ago.

'I've got a huge love of the classic pulp fictions, particularly the American side of things, like *The Shadow* and *The Spider*,' Mann continues, outlining his path to Blake discovery. 'Sherlock Holmes was also a huge love of mine, and has been since a very young age, so I was peripherally aware of Sexton Blake, but I'd never read any – there was a classic quote from the time, where he was called 'the poor man's Sherlock', so if you love Sherlock Holmes, you've got an awareness of him.'

It was Mann's ongoing, Edwardian era-set series of *Newbury & Hobbes* novels which drew him closer to Blake, initially through his discovery of Monsieur Zenith the Albino, Anthony Skene's great nemesis for Blake, who later influenced Michael Moorcock's *Elic* and appeared in Moorcock's metafictional universe.

'This was while I was looking at what else was going on around the time (during which *Newbury & Hobbes*' stories are set), doing a bit of research online into what else had a similar tone, says Mann. After this I went on eBay and bought a couple of Sexton Blake stories, classic 1920s pulps, and immediately fell in love with them, to be honest. I'm a bit of a collector, so once it got its hooks into me I started buying up more and more.

I started to correspond with Mark Hodder, who runs the *Blakiana* website, and with Michael Moorcock about his role in Sexton Blake and his collection, he continues. I actually traded a few photocopies of Zenith stories that were hard to come by with him. Through eBay I became a recurring customer of an American chap who was selling his original issues of the



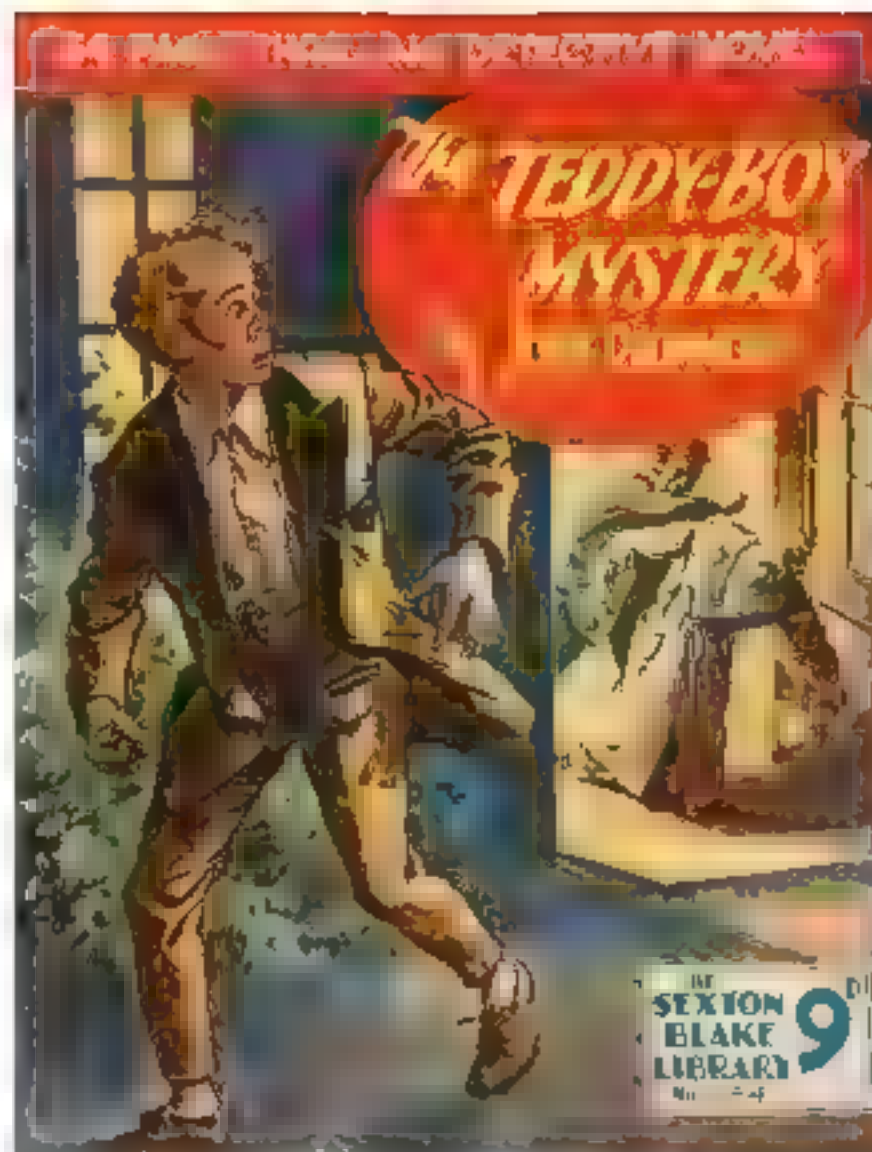
The Sexton Blake Library: First Series, Issue 26

Sexton Blake Library, and he said, "I notice you've bought quite a lot of these from me – I have boxes and boxes of them, would you be interested?"

Mann's enthusiasm for Blake is exemplified by the fact he did indeed buy this huge collection of **Union Jacks** and **Sexton Blake Library's** from the first half of the 20th century, and had them all shipped back from the States; there are so many he's still reading his way through them, although some are so fragile he's concerned they might disintegrate in his hands.

'They're great inspiration,' says Mann. 'Blake is an early action hero, with a great mind. What I love about him is what he becomes in the 1920s, really; he started off as a Sherlock Holmes clone, but fairly quickly started to take on an identity of his own. He was a shared character amongst a whole group of great writers, who took Blake and Tinker and created their own family of characters – villains and heroes and allies. So you've got this shared hero who can move in different circles, having lots of great adventures; he still remains that great detective, but he becomes more of an action hero than Holmes ever was.'

'He's happy to climb through a window or have some fisticuffs with someone he's trying to bring down, he'll really get stuck in there,' he continues. 'He's kind of the prototype for the great British hero, I think. His ongoing battle with Zenith the Albino is my favourite story arc, but actually, I really adore Blake's relationship with Yvonne, who starts off as a nemesis



The Sexton Blake Library, Third Series, issue 334

but becomes a love interest, a co-adventurer, over the course of a whole load of stories. His relationships with Yvonne and Zenith are the defining elements of Sexton Blake, for me.

As his knowledge of Blake has developed, Mann has enjoyed bringing the character to the attention of editors. First, to his then-editor at Snowbooks, whom he talked into letting him curate a large omnibus of Blake stories named **Sexton Blake: Detective** in 2009 (a second book, **Sexton Blake: Crimefighter**, was edited for release the following year, but the huge task of manually entering text from the old, unrecognisable-to-OCR [optical character recognition] pages meant it was shelved); and more recently, to his old friend Michael Rowley, who has edited this special.

'As soon as he was allowed to tell me that Rebellion had bought the rights to Sexton Blake, of course I waved my hands straight away and said that writing new Blake is on my bucket list,' says Mann, who is an experienced comic writer through his work on Titan's **Doctor Who**. 'We talked around what we should do with it – should we write a modern Sexton Blake in the here and now, or pick one of the eras to write about? After some consultation, the decision came back that we should go with the Golden Age period, which for me is the 1920s and 30s.'

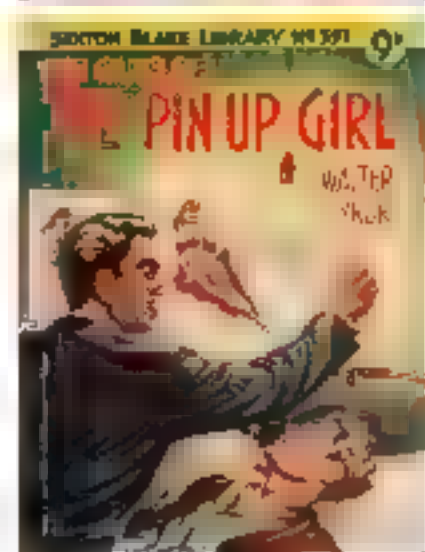
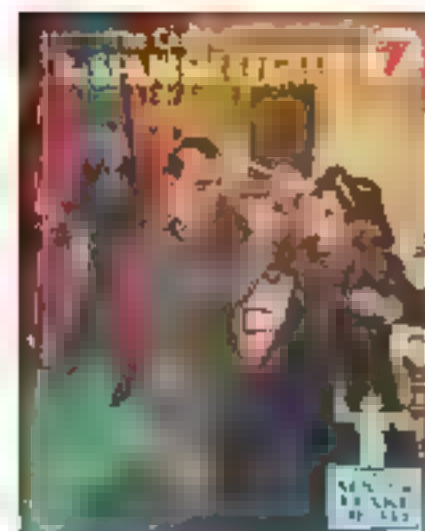
'I had a story in mind already, because when you've got a love for a character, you often have that, "if I had one chance



The Sexton Blake Library, First Series, issue 5



The Sexton Blake Library First Series, issue 325



The Sexton Blake Library Third Series, issues 392, 393, 394

to tell a Sexton Blake story, I'd love it to be this one" Although in the end I took elements of that and adapted it for this strip, because it was a much bigger story that probably would have taken a whole novel to do. I really wanted it to be about Blake pretending he'd died to entrap the villain, and symbolically that felt like the right type of story to tell for bringing him back to life in terms of these new stories, as well.'

Artist Jimmy Broxton was contacted to illustrate the strip by Rebellion, as among Broxton's work for them, most often in collaboration with writer Guy Adams, is the 2000 AD strip *Hope*, which has its own period setting in early 20th century California, and the graphic novel *Goldtiger* which visually riffs on various British pulp comic strip styles.

'I jumped at the chance for various reasons,' says Broxton

It was something different, because it was set in a different era, so I thought it sounded like a really nice project. That was maybe part of what they were thinking, that it's set in a very specific era and I've done stuff where I've hopefully captured the flavour of the period. It's not going to look like *Hope*, but they're expecting something by Jimmy Broxton so it's not going to be wildly different; although I am taking the opportunity to experiment a little bit.

Broxton's personal experience of Blake comes from an unusual place, although possibly one which relatively younger readers might recognise. 'My memories of Sexton Blake are of the 1960s TV show, and I wasn't actually old enough to watch it and understand it, but my dad was a big fan, he says. I remember Blake's Rolls Royce and everything, and the

adventure feel of it, but we're not going for that '60s era – we're going right back to the 1930s and '40s, the classic Eric Parker stuff, mainly from the **Union Jack** magazine

'I love the simplicity of Parker's art,' he explains. 'There's a directness and a simplicity to his linework approach, especially his colour work, and his compositions are fantastic. I'm really into the design side of comics, I spend a lot of time working on the compositions, balancing the positive and the negative space and all that, to make it really fun. You don't even notice it when you read the story, it's sort of hidden, but how it helps to tell the story is a big thing for me. And he was a master of that

The famous bust of Blake which Parker created as a mail in gift for **Union Jack** readers was also a key reference point for Broxton. 'It's a fantastic little sculpture of how Eric Parker viewed him, and that's what I've based my look on,' he says. 'Obviously some of his paintings and illustrations as well, but I think this bust in particular really nailed what people think Sexton Blake looked like. That's been my point of visual reference, and it got me thinking, wow, I'd like to sculpt one – we should get Rebellion to do one! Get it 3D printed or something, why not?

Although the art hasn't been finished when we speak, Broxton also has ideas for using era-specific techniques which

might help give these ten pages a period feel; anyone who has seen his work on **Goldtiger** will know how capable he is of this. In the meantime, the scenery and setting are helping to give the world of Sexton Blake life for him.

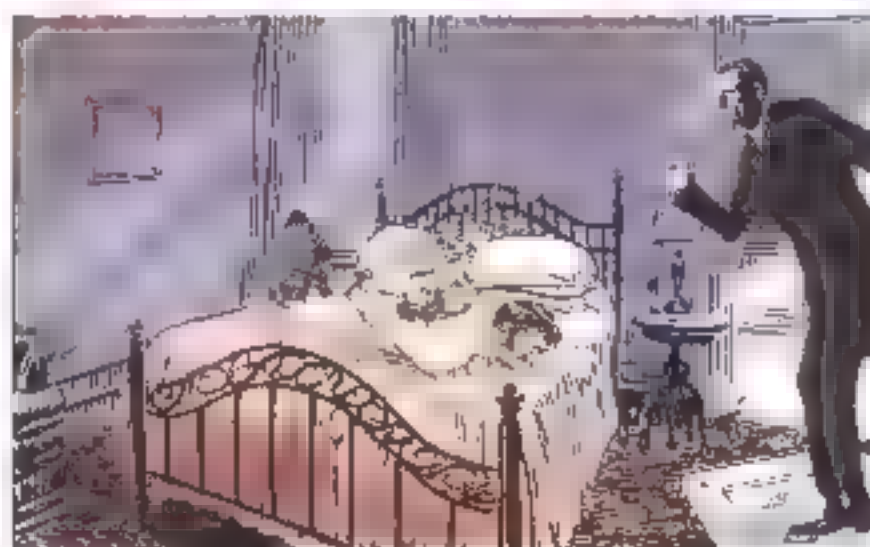
'I like authentic detail,' he says. 'If somebody's on the phone, it's got to be the right phone from the right era... I mean, I'm not going to Kubrick levels of obsession, but it should look the part. I also love drawing cars, although not many comic artists do. I think he's got a Bentley in this one, it's not a Rolls, so researching all of that's great fun. Of course, these days you can use 3D models to create angles, I don't do it myself, but it's interesting that you can use really up-to-date technology to help create something from the 1930s. I love the contradiction of that, I find it fascinating.

'This strip could have been done then (in the 1930s), he continues. 'It's not a reimagining or anything like that, it's quite authentic. Some characters belong in the era where they were first featured, and I think Sexton Blake is one of them, a bit like Sherlock Holmes. The most enjoyable aspect of that for me is more on the technical side, in terms of how I'm making the artwork look – like you're looking through a magazine from the '30s or '40s, but that it not be old-fashioned.'

'I wrote it like you'd write a modern comic, like you'd write a strip for **2000 AD** or **Spider-Man** or **Batman**,' elaborates



Sexton Blake bust, designed by Eric Parker



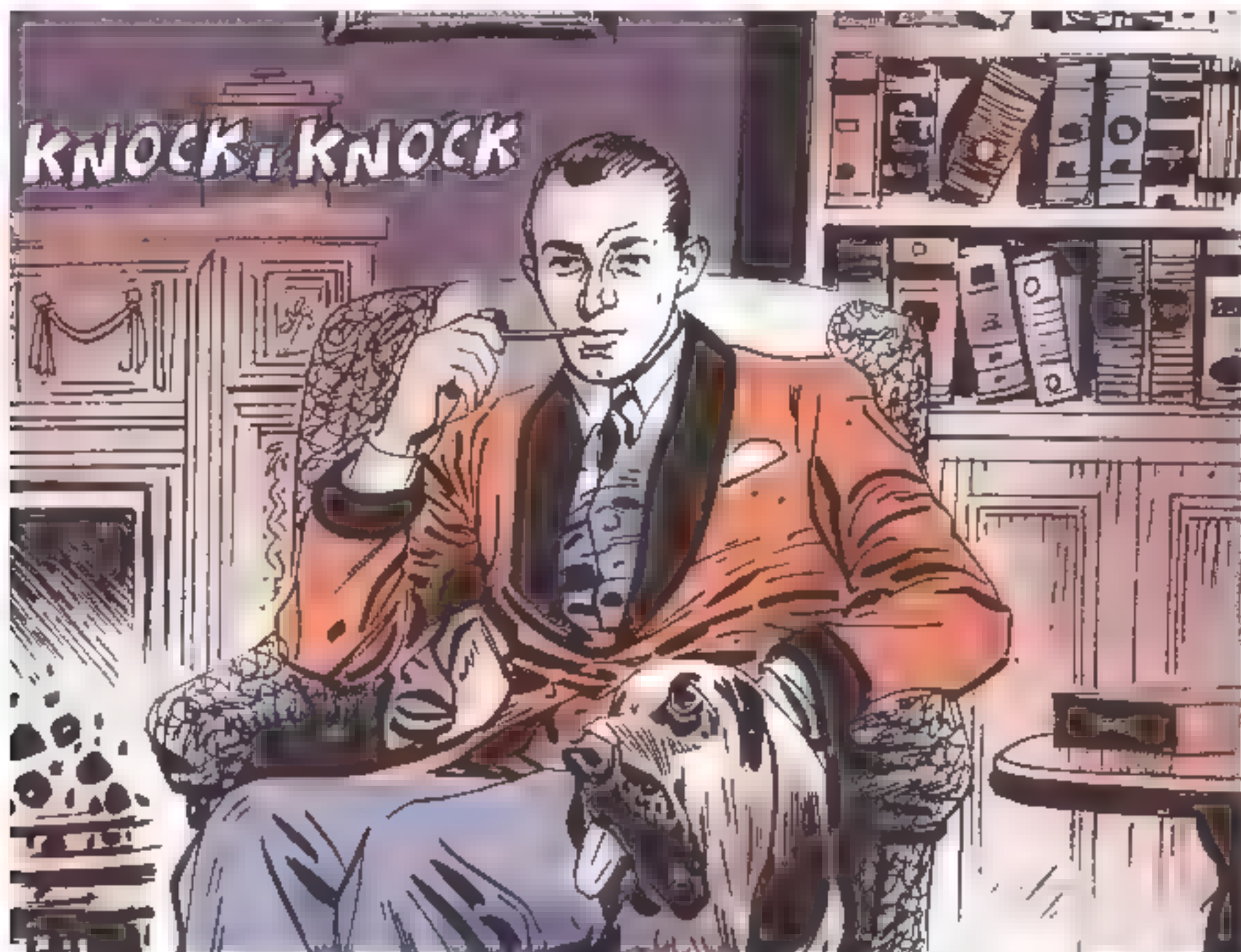
Panels from *By Death and Life of Sexton Blake*, Jimmy Broxton, 28-29

Mann. 'Hopefully it's approachable for a modern audience, as well. There's a big audience out there for classic crime in general, and I think Sexton Blake will appeal to that new, wider audience of people who will love it as much as we do, if they only knew about it.'

Blake isn't cosy crime, but actually, by virtue of the era you're working in and the type of stories you're telling, I think they fit quite well alongside that – not the 'lady baker solving crimes in a bucolic village' end of the market, but the Agatha Christie end, or the British Library range of modern Crime Classics. That's proved to be a huge audience, actually, and it's exactly the same thing that we're hoping to do, bringing forgotten classics back and putting them in front of a modern crime audience which is very much buying into and enjoying it. Particularly at the moment, where a lot of people are having a difficult time, something that's a bit familiar is very welcome.'

Both creators give an indication that this might only be the beginning of the new adventures of Sexton Blake, if readers buy into this world in the way that they both have. 'I've already said to Michael that I'd love to make this an ongoing strip if

the opportunity were there,' says Mann. 'Rebellion are wisely being cautious and testing the market with the excellent reprint collections Mark Hodder's been putting together for them. But I feel very honoured to be the first person to write a new Sexton Blake story, and yes, I would give my hind teeth to write some more.'



Panels from *The Death and Life of Sexton Blake* (minicomics, 2020)





THE MEN WHO DREW SEXTON BLAKE

BY MARK HODDER



The first image of Sexton Blake

In *Union Jack* issue 79, published in 1905, the author, A. G. Pearson, wrote: "... artists had to trust entirely to their memories, for Sexton Blake had always consistently refused to have his photograph taken, and imagination had come to the aid of the artists' memories in nearly every case, with some very curious results

This might explain why it took three decades before there was anything approaching a consistent visual representation of Sexton Blake.

The first ever portrait of the detective, in his debut story, *The Missing Millionaire* by Hal Mercedeth (Harold Blyth) in *The Halfpenny Marvel* issue 6, 1893, was drawn by an uncredited artist. It depicted him as a burly, middle-aged man, holding a cane and wearing a hat and overcoat.

Though he appeared a little younger in subsequent images, Blake remained wholly nondescript. Various artists contributed to his early adventures, most remaining anonymous, though some signatures can be discerned: A. White; Willis; Tom Somerfield; R. J. MacDonald; W. Warts; Vincent Daniel; C. H. Blake; and W. Taylor.

From 1905, the most frequent and notable illustrators were Harry Lane, Fred Holmes, T. W. Holmes, E. E. Briscoe, Val Reading, G. M. Dodgson, and Henry Lewis.

Their styles were pretty interchangeable, all being line-based with cross-hatching for shading. They delivered competent figure work and decent compositions, the variations between them being relatively minor. Fred Holmes, for example, offered slightly more dynamic light and shade, while Henry Lewis's work was identifiable by the "frozen in the moment" quality of his action scenes.

Harry Lane was the first to give Blake a distinctive feature:

hair that receded at the temples. Lewis and Reading quickly added that element to their own portrayals.

The first to offer a superior version of this style arrived on the scene in 1906. Fred Bennett's line work had greater flair, with better contrast and clever use of white space. Frequently, he added a dash of comedy, the latter especially apparent in facial expressions. Occasionally, this went a little too far, and felt incompatible with the theme of the story.

1913 saw the arrival of Arthur Jones as a Blake illustrator. Initially, his work in the *Union Jack* adhered to the established style but, it must be said, was slightly inferior. His figure work, in particular, was stiff and occasionally even inept. He did, however, inject far more vigour into action scenes than anyone else.

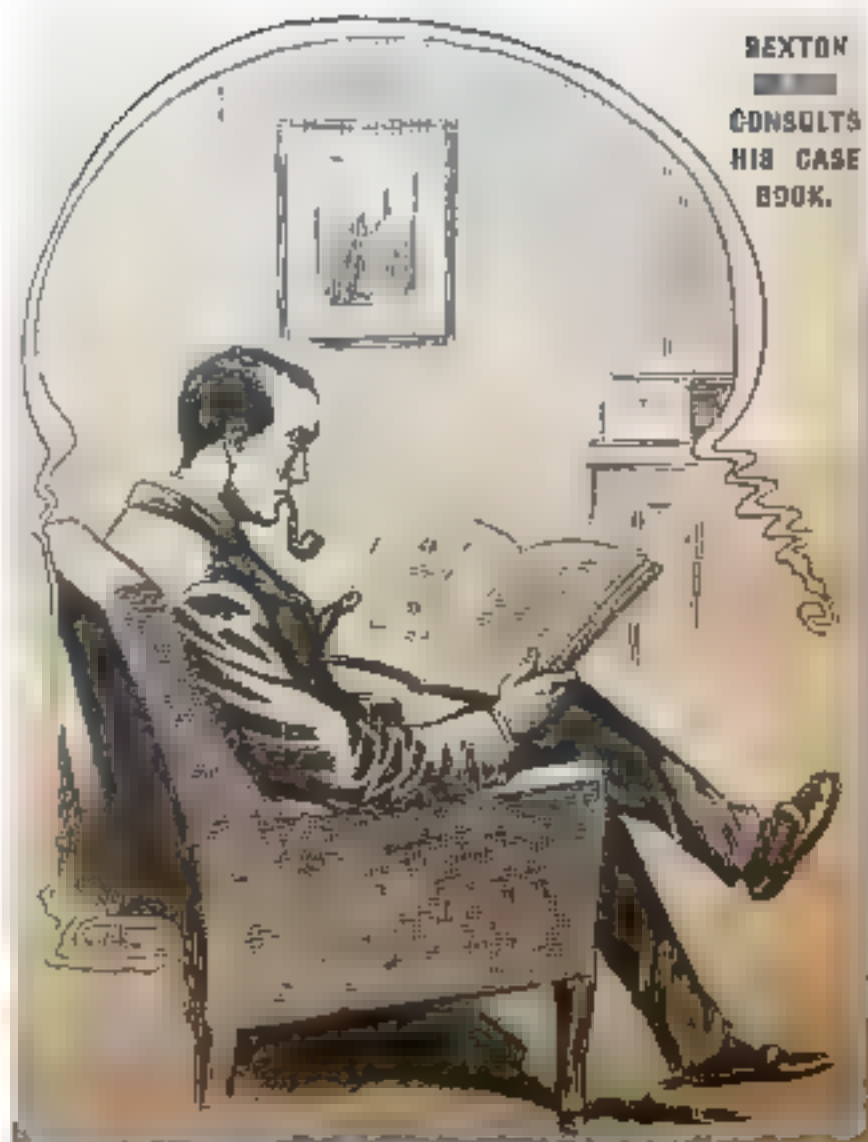
Nevertheless, when his illustrations for the *Union Jack* are taken in their entirety, it's difficult to fathom why Jones found favour with Amalgamated Press. Perhaps he was simply more



Fred Lewis' Sexton Blake. From *Union Jack* issue 126 (1906).
Sexton Blake in Bay



Fred Bennett's Sexton Blake imprisoned in the gaug. From *The Daily Friend*, issue 745. Also: Sexton Blake on the Railway, part 1.



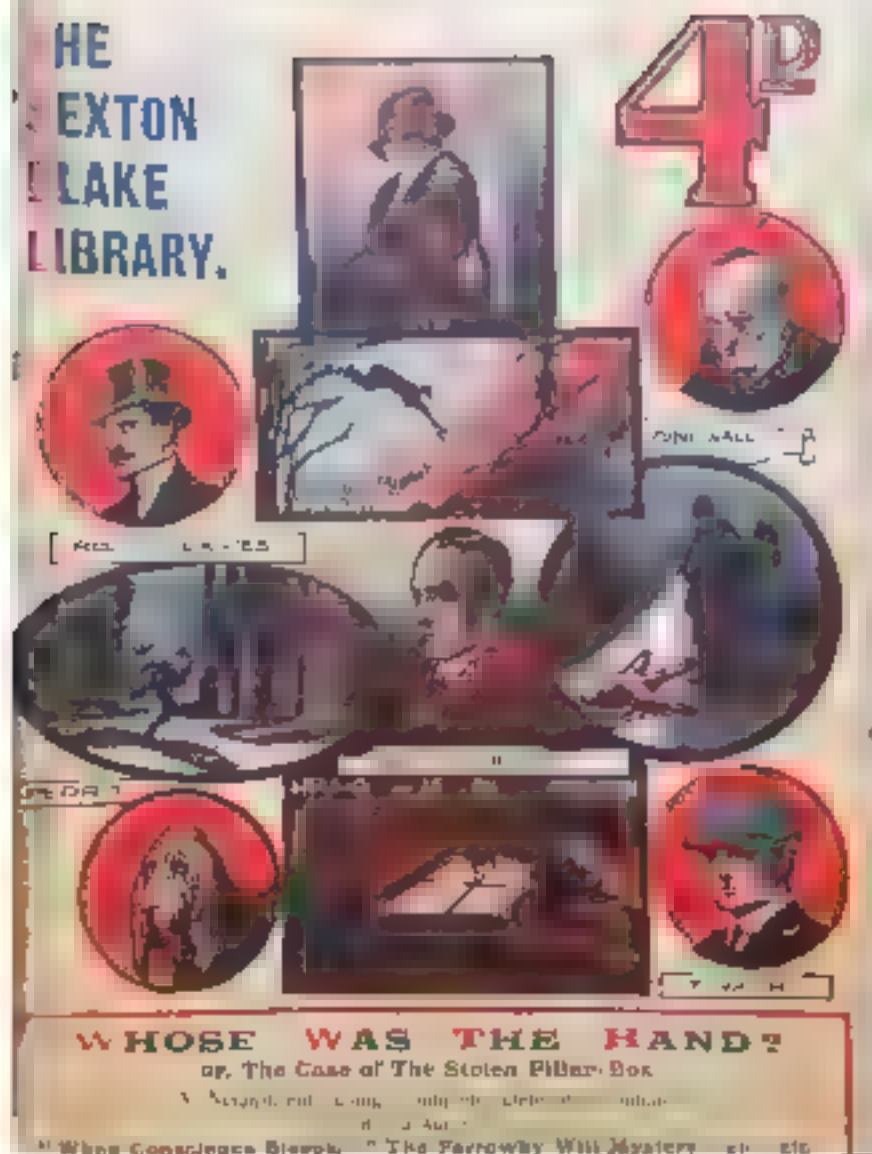
Fred Lewis' Sexton Blake. From *Union Jack* issue 126 (1906).
The Thumb-Print Club

THE MYSTERY OF AN ATTESTED MAN!

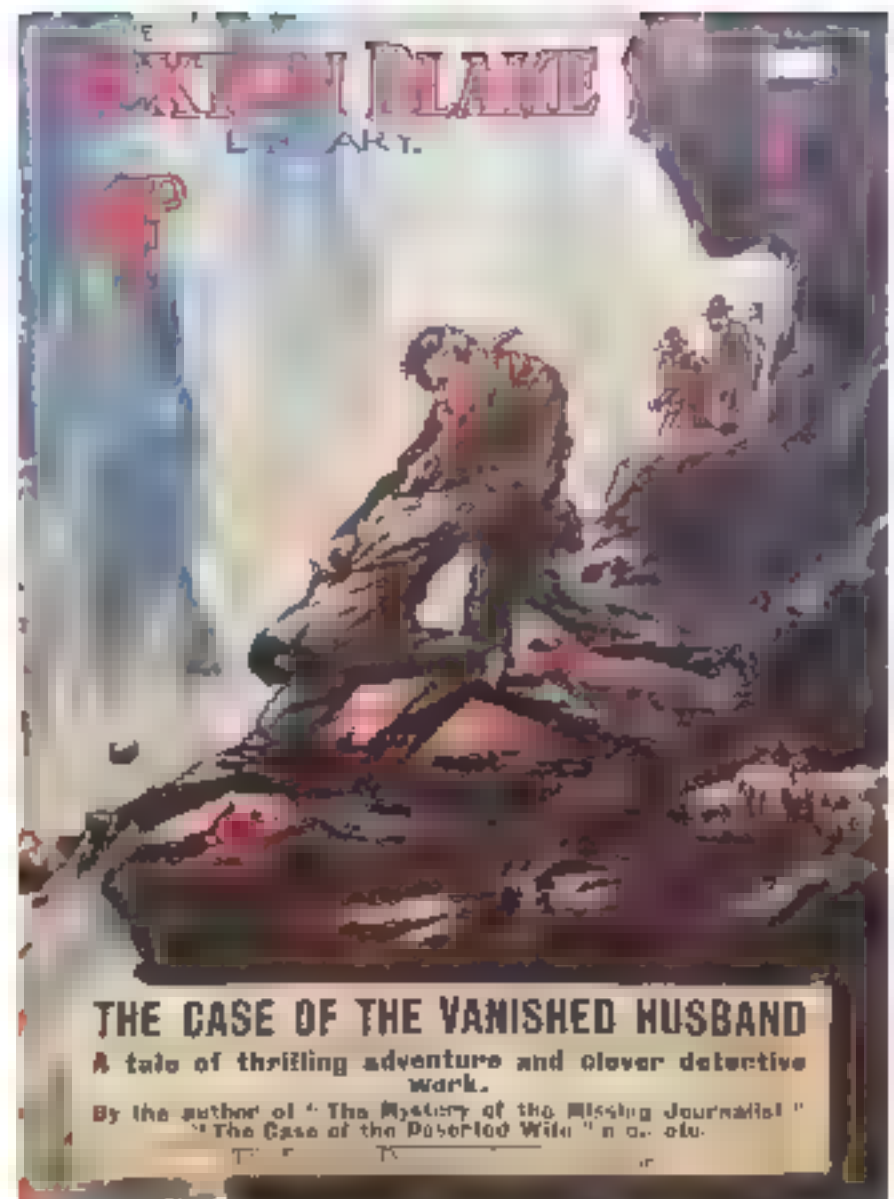


A STORY OF SEXTON BLAKE, DETECTIVE

Arthur Jones's Sexton Blake, *Union Jack*, issue 650, 1916



Arthur Jones cover, *The Sexton Blake Library*, First Series, issue 50, 1918.



Arthur Jones cover, *The Sexton Blake Library*, First Series, issue 247, 1922.

reusable. Whatever the explanation, when *The Sexton Blake Library* launched in 1915, he was the artist selected to provide all the covers (there were no internal illustrations).

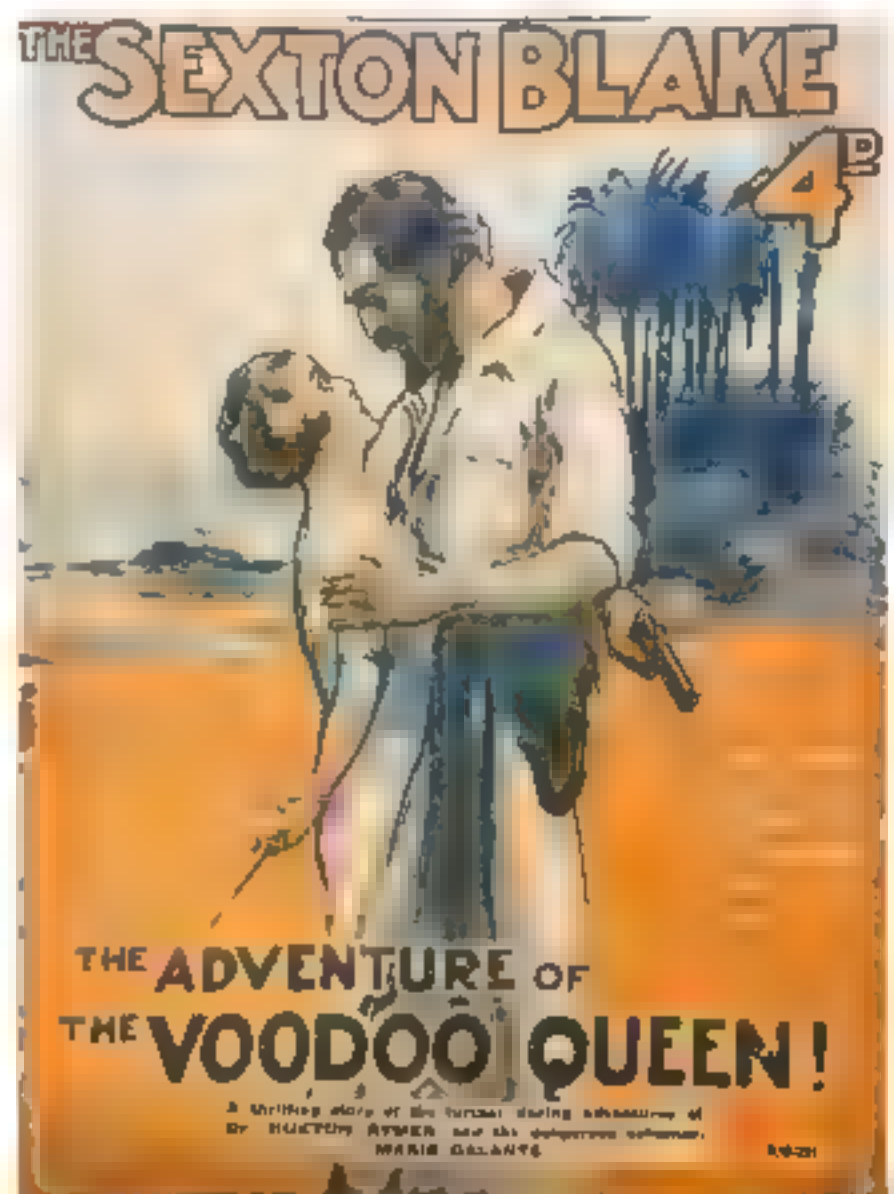
He got off to a tremendous start. His cover for issue 1, *The Yellow Tiger*, was stunning.

The following year, he also surpassed himself with a very Sherlock Holmesian Blake for *Union Jack* issue 650 in 1916. It was, perhaps, the best of all the *Union Jack* covers prior to the 1920s.

It was in the second *Sexton Blake Library* onwards, that all of Jones's artistic strengths and weaknesses were displayed. His figures, as previously stated, never looked anything less than awkward. His colour work, however, which had never been seen before, was tremendous. For all his failings as a draughtsman, he had the knack of communicating atmosphere. He did every *Sexton Blake Library* cover from 1915 through to 1929 and those that weren't supremely atmospheric were action-packed, and many were both.

It's safe to say that Arthur Jones was THE *Sexton Blake* artist until the advent of Eric Parker.

Eric Parker made his debut in 1922, in *Union Jack* issue 995. This was shortly after editorship of "Sexton Blake's own story paper" had passed to Harold William Twyman. "Twy," as he was known, wanted the *Union Jack* to have a regular



Arthur Jones cover, *The Sexton Blake Library*, Second Series, issue 55, 1926.

artist, someone to provide an easily recognisable image of the Baker Street sleuth. Over the ensuing decade, the older group of illustrators were gradually phased out until, for the most part, only Parker and an artist named John Harris Valda remained.

Valda had a fine pedigree. He was the son of John Harris Valda senior, a painter who'd studied with John Millais and been commissioned to paint Edward VII's portrait. In 1895, aged only 21, Valda (junior) had opened his own art school, which he claimed was the first in Britain to teach magazine

illustration. It also taught fashion, advertising, poster and catalogue illustration. The school closed in 1912.

After the war, Valda joined Amalgamated Press. He made his first contribution to the Blake stories in 1923, *Union Jack* issue 1,044.

He and Parker are the only illustrators whose work can be seen to evolve over the course of many issues. In Valda's case, to begin with, he employed the same line and cross-hatching techniques as his predecessors. However, possibly because he was in competition with Parker, he gradually developed an easily recognised, looser style, with thicker outlining and sketchier backgrounds. His figures are characterised by their stockiness, big hands, and heavily boned faces. Most writers were, by the 1920s, describing Sexton Blake as tall and rangy. Valda's Blake was the opposite of that!

Eric Parker did not come from an artistic family. His father was a clock-maker, as was his grandfather. However, his talent was apparent at an early age, and when he was fifteen, he became the first ever London County Council schoolboy to win an Art Scholarship with a maintenance grant, giving him entry to the Central School of Art.

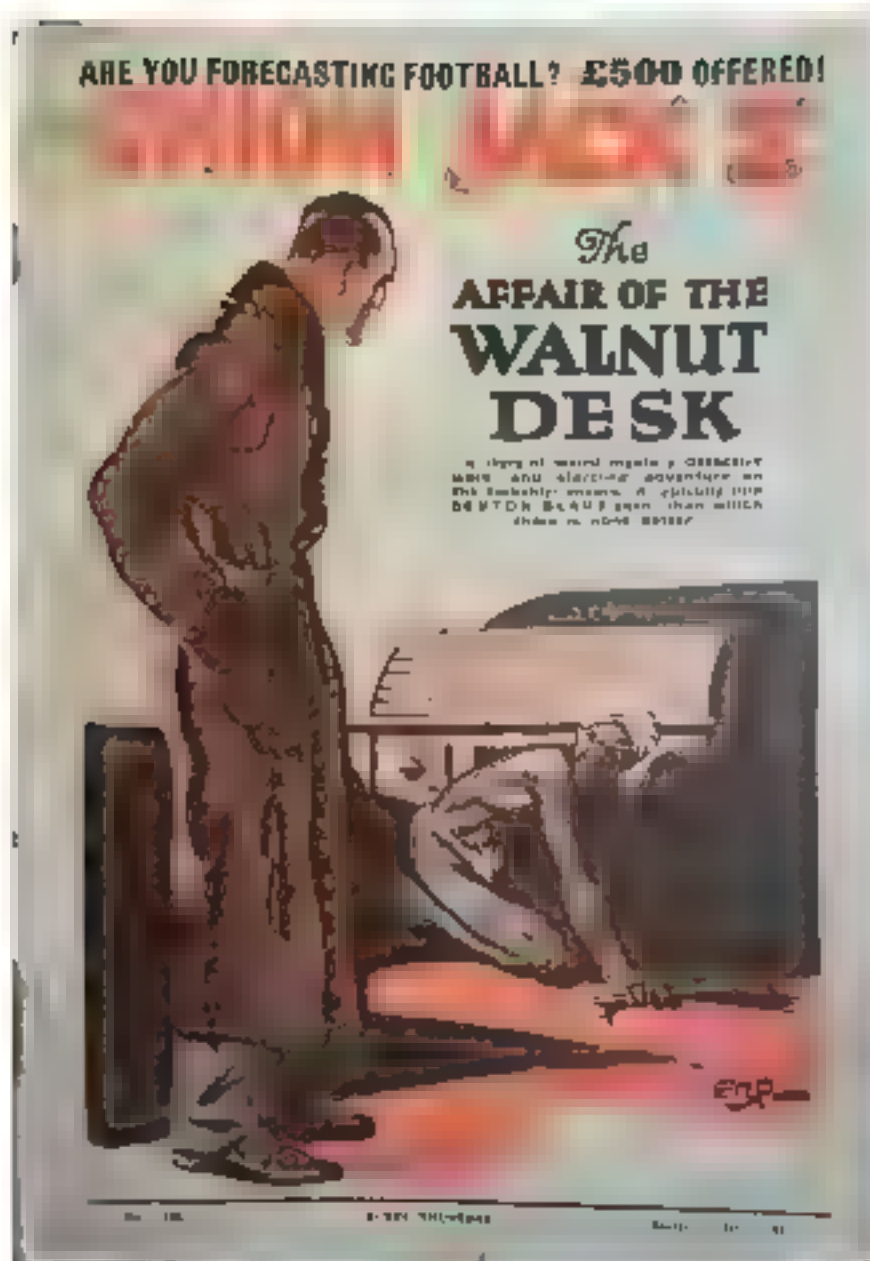
Like Valda, he served during the war and became an illustrator afterwards, and also like Valda, his initial work for *Union Jack* followed the classic style. From the outset, his Blake resembled a more Holmesian version of Harry Lane's, but then, over the course of three years, his line work became much more fluid,



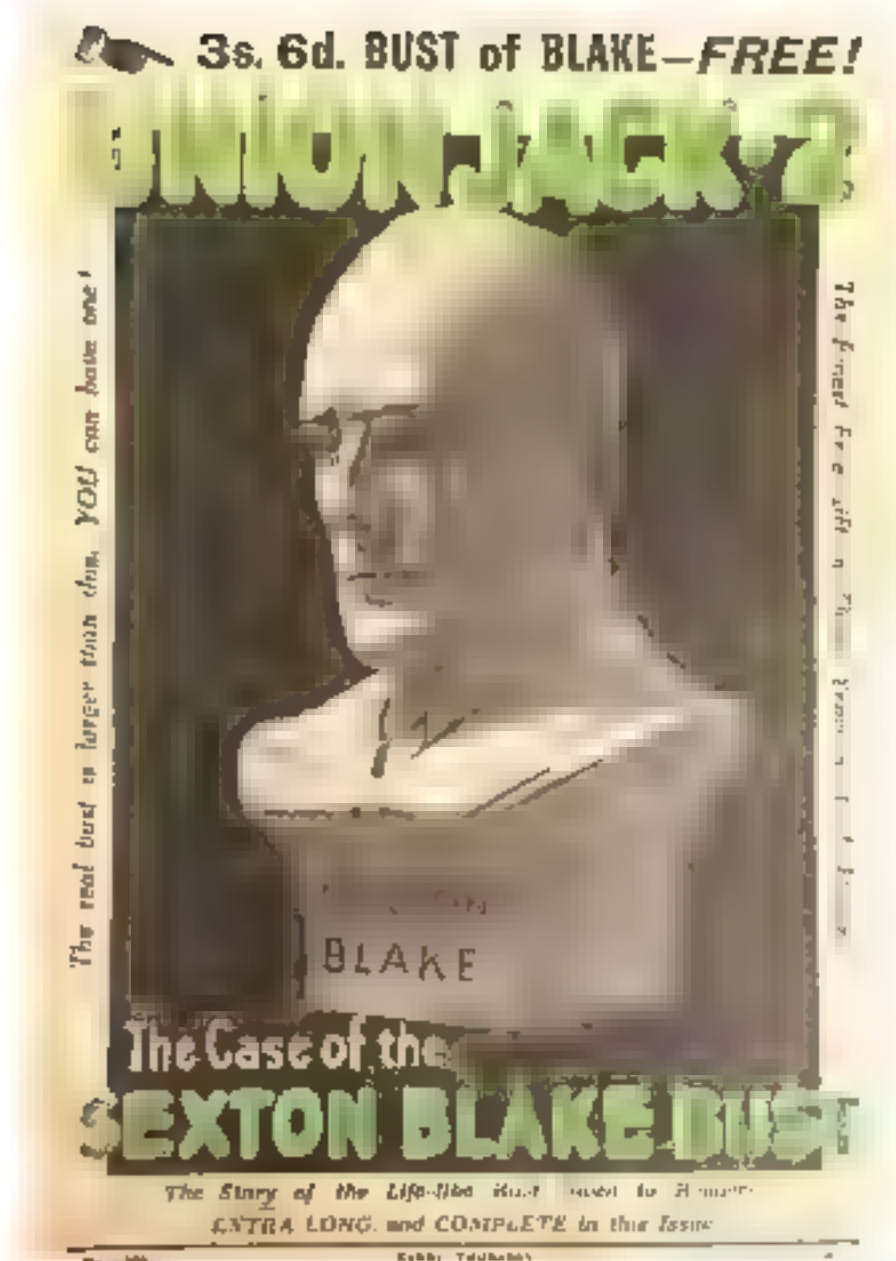
J.H. Valda's Sexton Blake, illustrated in *Union Jack*, issue 1,044, 1923



J.H. Valda's Sexton Blake, illustrated in *Union Jack*, issue 1,340, 1929



Eric Parker's Sexton Blake, *Union Jack*, issue 1,145



Eric Parker's Sexton Blake bust, *Union Jack*, issue 1,169

communicating form and movement in single, masterful strokes.

By 1925, his Blake perfectly complemented the text descriptions.

Parker based the depiction on a commercial traveler he met at a club. The gentleman in question was a solitary man, tall, lean and distinguished, with slightly receding hair. Parker first saw him sitting alone and smoking a pipe, and was immediately impressed.

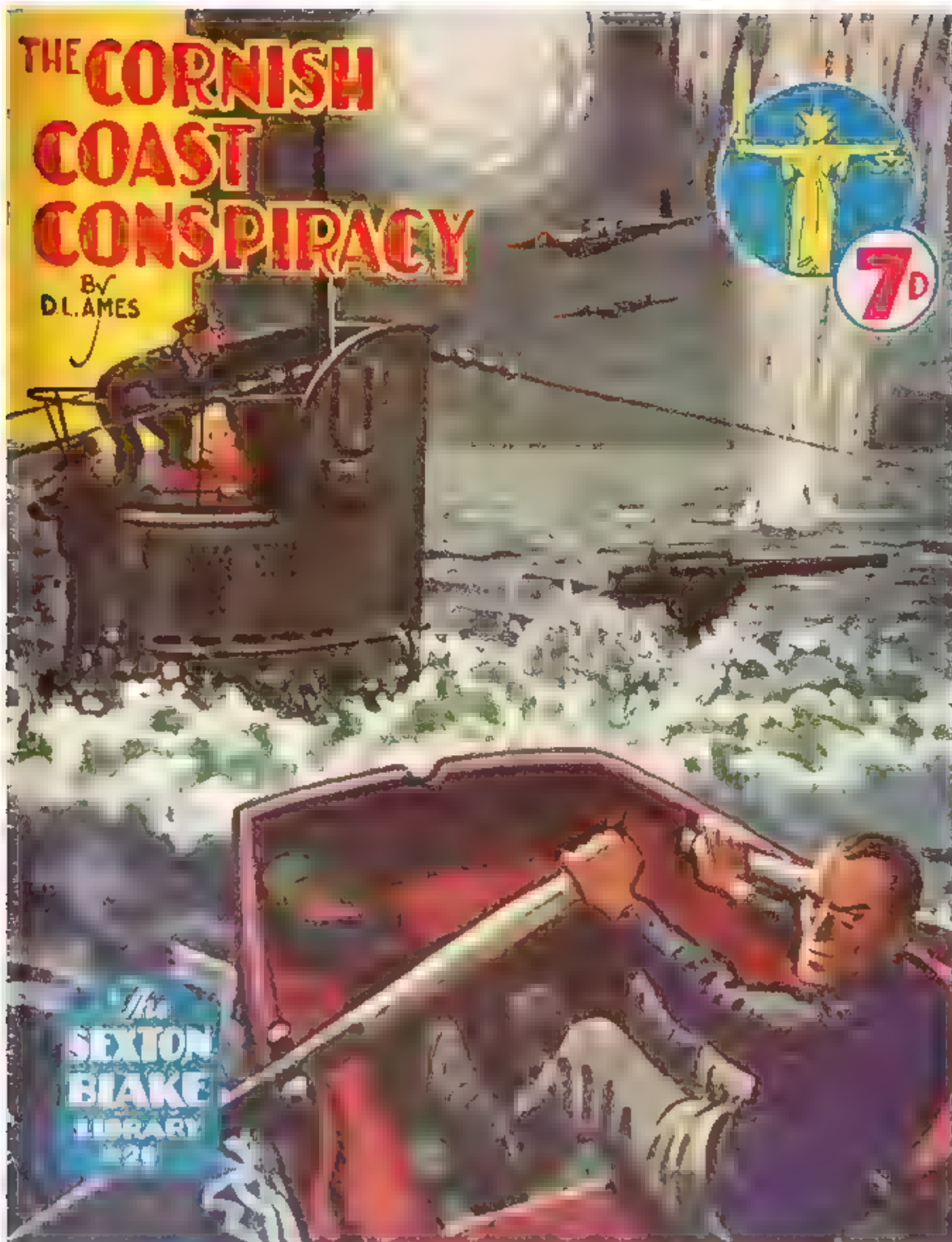
By 1930, his work had become so popular with readers that Leonard Pratt, the editor of *The Sexton Blake Library*, drew on his services, marking the beginning of the end for Arthur Jones, who'd been providing four covers every month for fifteen years.

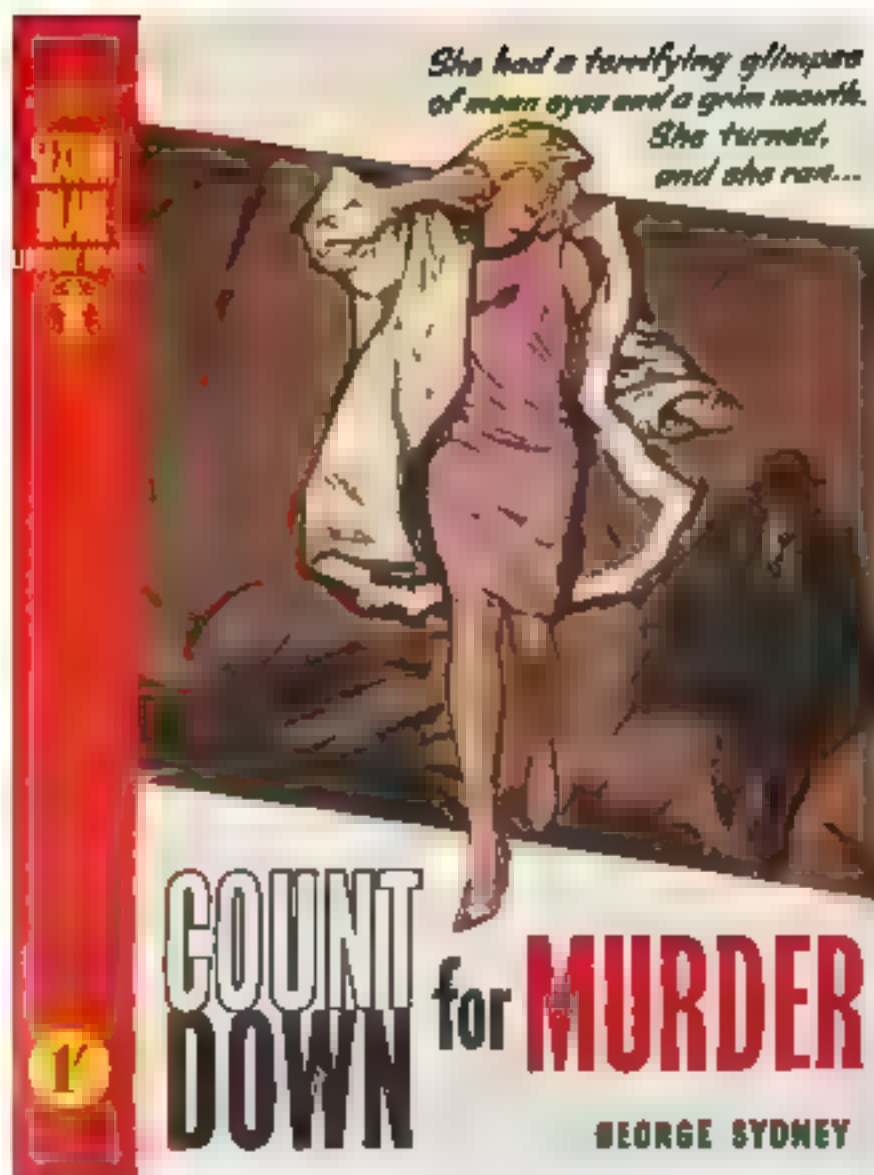
One of Parker's most outstanding contributions came in 1926 when the *Union Jack* offered a seven-inch tall Sexton Blake bust to readers who applied for it after having passed five copies of the paper to friends. This was actually Parker's first attempt at sculpture, and he made an astonishingly good job of it. About 850 of the busts were made originally but they were easily broken, and only about a dozen are known to still exist.

Through the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s, Parker came to dominate the field, surviving the transformation of *Union Jack*

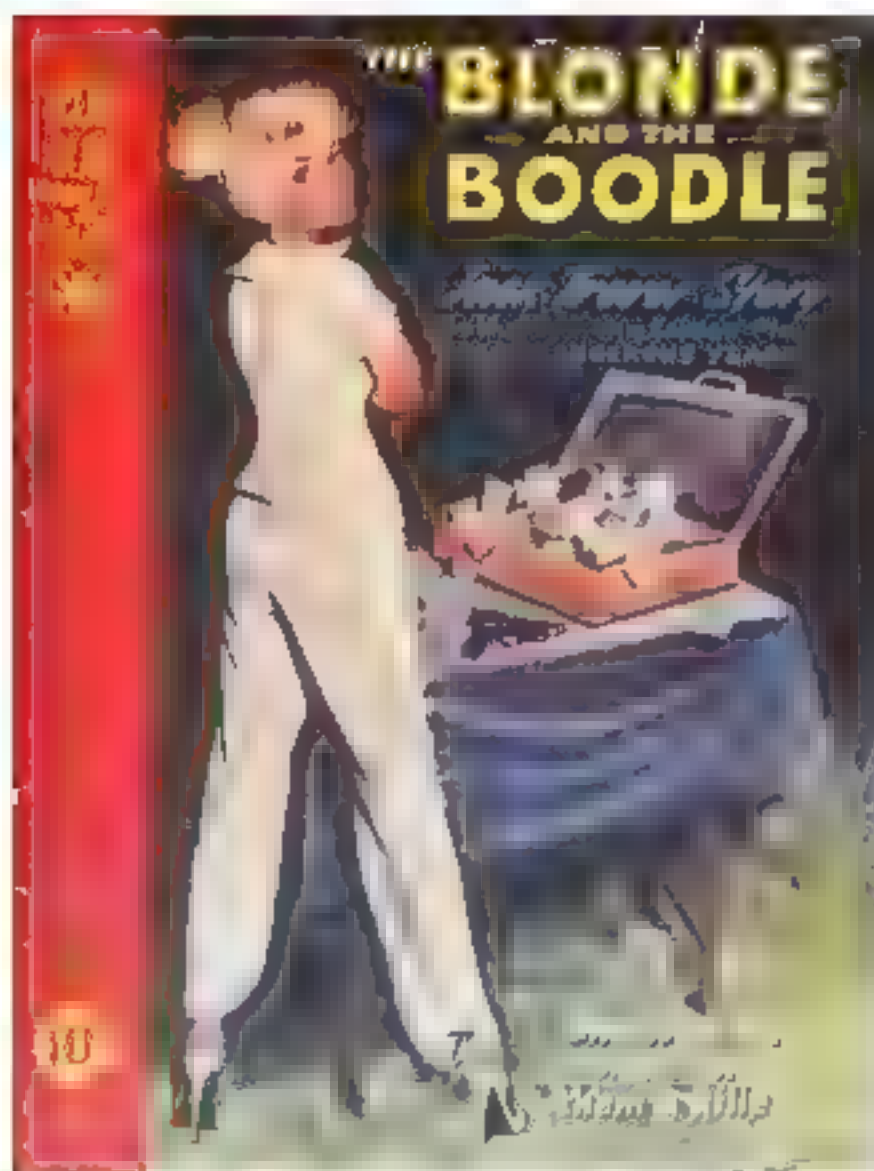


Eric Parker *The Sexton Blake Library*, Series Two, issue 711, 1940





Longgdon, The Sexton Blake Library, Series Four, issue 493, 1962



Conspiro, The Sexton Blake Library, Series Four, issue 394, 1957

into **Detective Weekly** in 1933 and the dropping of Blake from that paper in 1935. He edged out Valda to become the only Blake artist that mattered. He even provided the first Blake strips for **Knock-Out Comic**.

As with Arthur Jones, Parker's best portrait of Blake was a very Sherlockian one. His cover for the first issue of **Detective Weekly** in 1933 is widely considered as the definitive rendition of the detective. Yes, there's an undeniable resemblance to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creation but Parker managed to highlight the difference by endowing Blake with intense, flashing eyes, a gun held ready for action, and a palpable intensity.

After the **Detective Weekly** folded, Parker became the sole cover artist for **The Sexton Blake Library**. It was here that he refined his technique, reducing his line work to a bare minimum. This was partially necessitated by a very heavy workload but was also a result of his becoming so comfortable with the character that he was able to communicate more by means of less.

In the mid Fifties, W. Howard Baker took over editorship of **The Sexton Blake Library**, and that marked the end of Parker's long and phenomenal relationship with the detective. He painted his final **Sexton Blake Library** cover in 1959.

For the remainder of its existence, **The Sexton Blake Library** employed various artists to provide its pulp-inspired covers. None of them were memorable.

Chronologically-speaking, the last Blake artist of any note was Mike Dorey, whose rendition of Blake ended up being someone else altogether. This was in 1972, when an offshoot of **2000 AD**, **Tornado**, ran for 22 issues. Dorey drew a Blake strip for it, modelling his detective on Parker's rendition and turning in some stunning artwork.

Unfortunately, a copyright problem arose and, at the last minute, the name Sexton Blake had to be replaced with "Victor Drago." Aside from the number plate on the detective's car, no changes were required to the artwork itself, so it's fair to say that, where visual imagery is concerned, this was Blake's last gasp.



Mike Dorey's Victor Drago, **Tornado**, issue 1, 1972





REDESIGNING SEXTON BLAKE

AN INTERVIEW WITH THEO BAIN

BY KARL STOCK

Sexton Blake Sexton Blake
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Sexton Blake

'THE BRIEF WAS to make these books look exciting,' says Theo Bain, head of illustration at Brighton-based design agency Crush Creative, the company employed by Rebellion to make sure their new line of repackaged Sexton Blake tales from the early 20th century feel fresh, relevant and thoroughly attractive to the browsing reader.

After all, Blake might be a hero out of time, but that doesn't mean he can't return to compete in a prose marketplace where Sherlock Holmes, James Bond and Miss Marple continue to be seductive bookshop staples. 'That was another aspect to it, that Rebellion wanted these books to feel like they would sit on the shelf along with the Agatha Christie novels,' continues Bain. 'I'm not sure if those publications have been republished since then, but they all had the Agatha Christie signature across them at one point.'

The signature of 'Sexton Blake' himself heads each of the five Sexton Blake Library volumes so far released or announced for this year and next, a strong branding flourish which draws this multi-decade series of adventures together under one banner. 'Obviously the books are written by different authors, but Rebellion wanted it to seem like Sexton Blake himself had written his name across the books,' says Bain.

The signature was probably the longest process, actually, he continues. 'It involved three graphic designers in the end, because we all wanted to get it right. It had to feel authentic, as if he had written it, and that went through a lot of iterations. We looked at signatures of the period when the books were first set, just to get a flavour for it - it's incredible what you can find on Google! - and we tried a more contemporary look. There were many, many iterations of it, before we all agreed on one which works.'

SEXTON BLAKE



Another major feature which is incorporated into the design of each book cover is the figure of Blake himself – although not actually fully seen, but rather as a mysterious silhouette which frames the action scene representing the story within. ‘I decided to use the silhouette quite quickly, to be honest,’ says Bam, who handled all of the illustration himself and worked with other designers on the signature and text fonts.

‘I experimented a little bit in the early stages with drawing Sexton Blake, but it just felt wrong – it felt that we needed to give him an air of mystery. I mean, I did a lot of reading up about Blake and, you know, this character’s been around since the early 1900s and he’s still very much a James Bond character in the 1960s, so he has this sort of mysterious, ageless, age-defying ability. It just felt right to make him a silhouette, to give him an air of mystery, and as Eric Parker had created such an iconic look for him, it felt more respectful to keep him as a silhouette, rather than to try and recreate him.

Much like the Blake aficionados spoken to elsewhere in this title, Bam’s research soon led him to Parker’s run as illustrator on Blake’s comic adventures in *Union Jack* in the 1920s and 1930s, for which he created the definite design of the character as a tall, lean pipe-smoker with receding hair. In fact, a strange

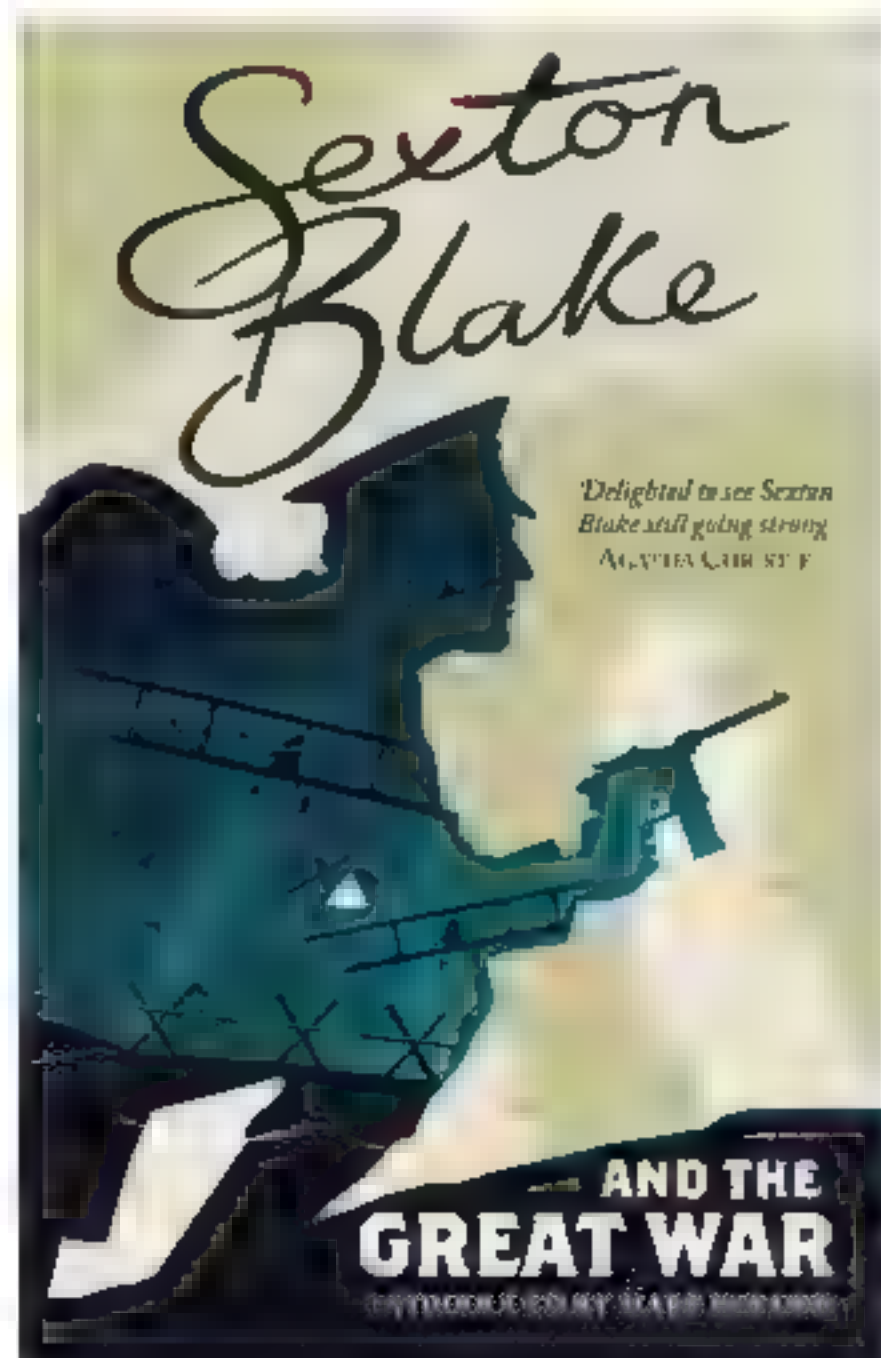




physical curio of the time also informed him, as it informed many of those others.

'I think the biggest challenge with these covers was that Sexton Blake has got such a rich history, but Eric Parker was the guy who illustrated a lot of the (classic) Blake comics, says Bain. 'In my research I also discovered that he'd created a bust of Blake that had been available through **Union Jack** comic back in the 1920s, which gave Blake this very iconic look. So going into it, what I didn't want to do was take away from that iconic look, which is why we decided to do the covers with the silhouettes of his face. It also helped to make him more timeless, because obviously these books start from World War I and then we come right up to the 1960s, so of course, we didn't want to age him in time with them.'

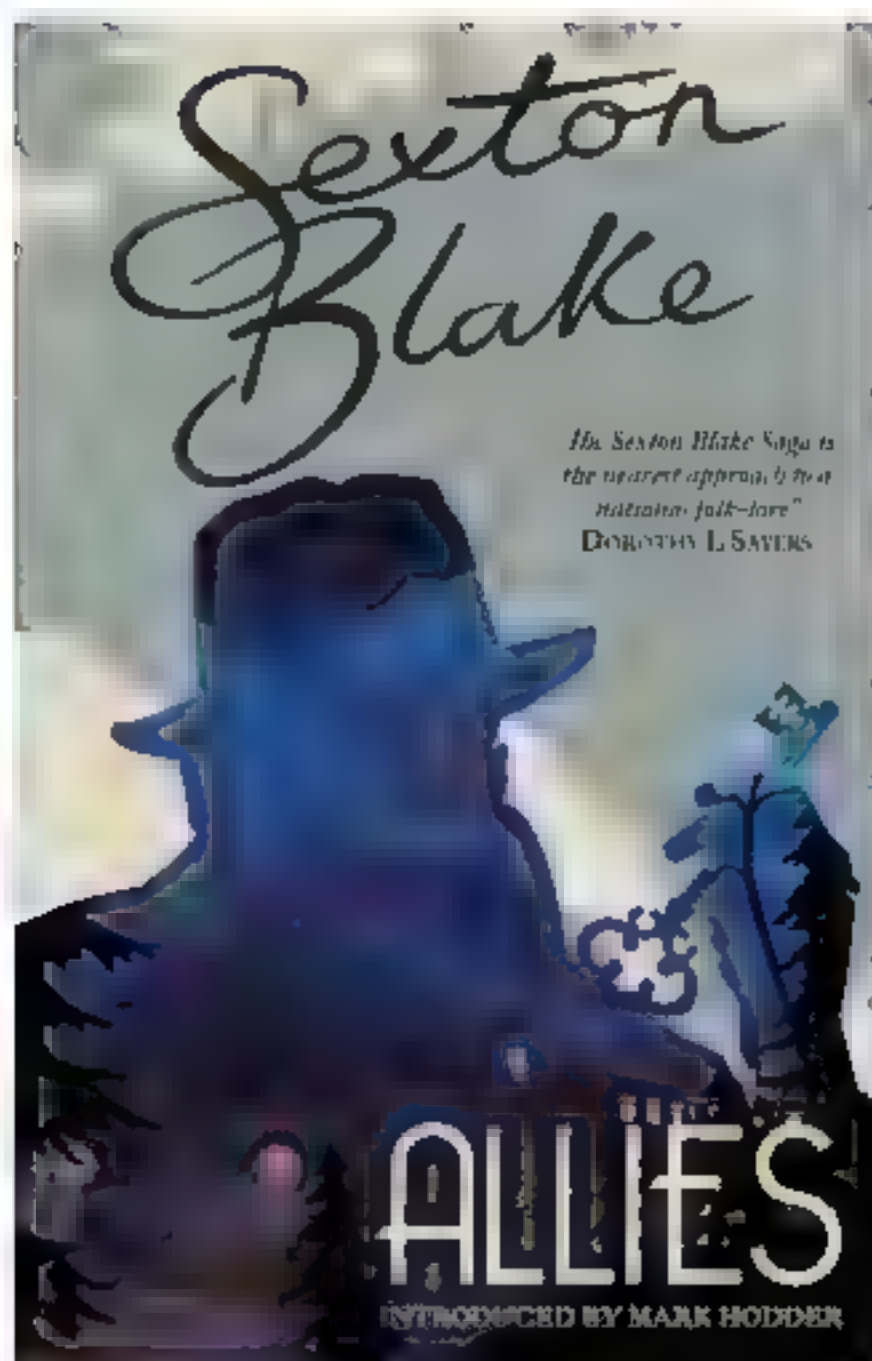
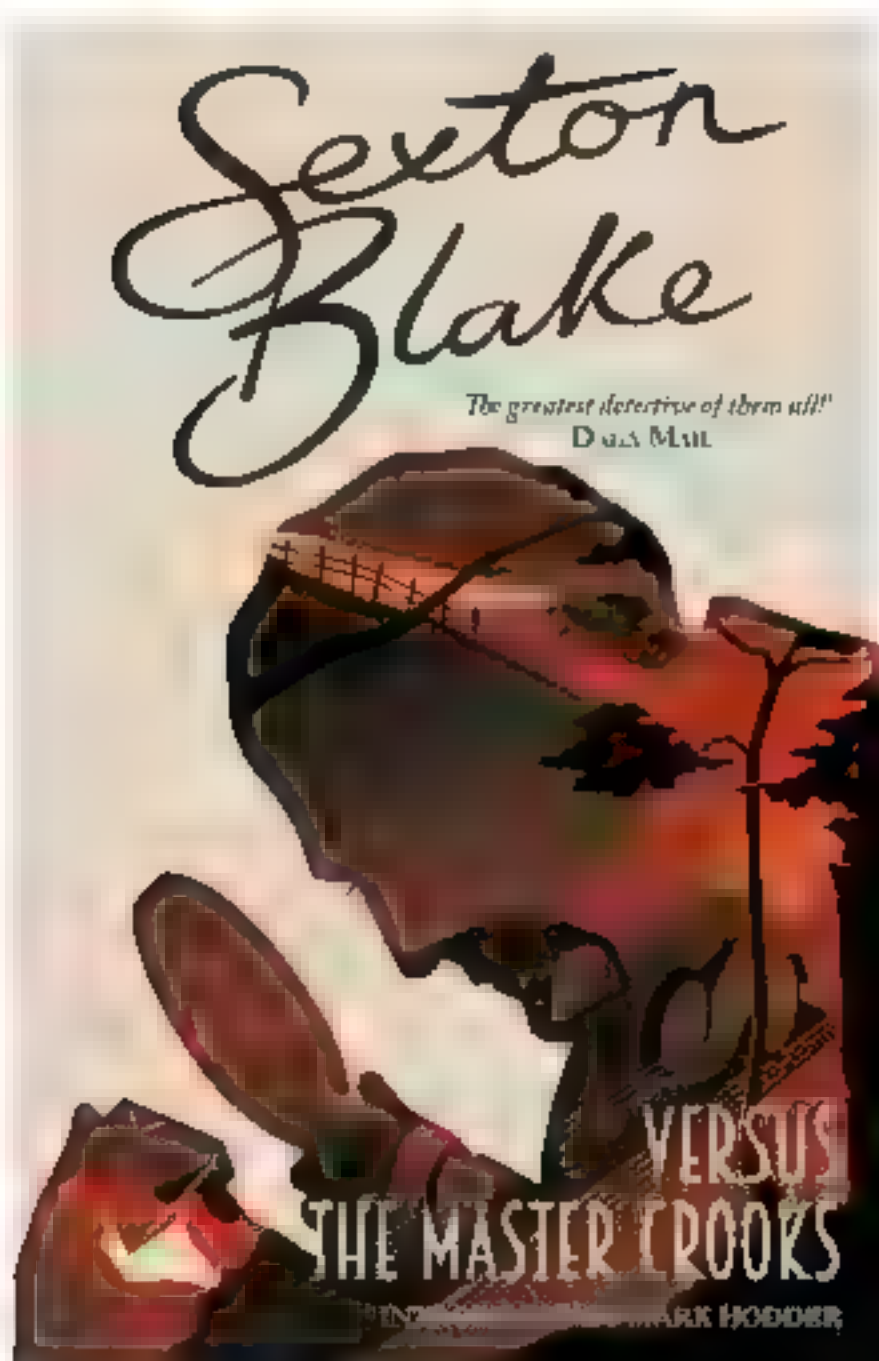
Each collection contains multiple stories, and Bain took the decision with these covers not to prioritise any one over the other. 'Each illustration has elements in it that have been sort of absorbed from each of the stories, so that it's not representative of just one of them,' he says. Beyond the established furniture of signature and silhouette, however, each cover bears colour and imagery which gives us some indication as to the era in which the contents are set



'I don't know if you've seen the 1960s one yet' asks Bain, referring to next April's Volume 5, *Sexton Blake's New Order*. 'With that for example the colours are much more vibrant and acidic, representing the colours used in 1960s art. With all of the books we looked at colour palettes for the period, and then there are maps behind the main images,

which are taken from the period when each of the books was written. So yeah, we looked at colour palettes and worked with them to give it the feel of something retro, but obviously they're done in vectors, so the colours are a lot crisper, rather than being hand-painted.'

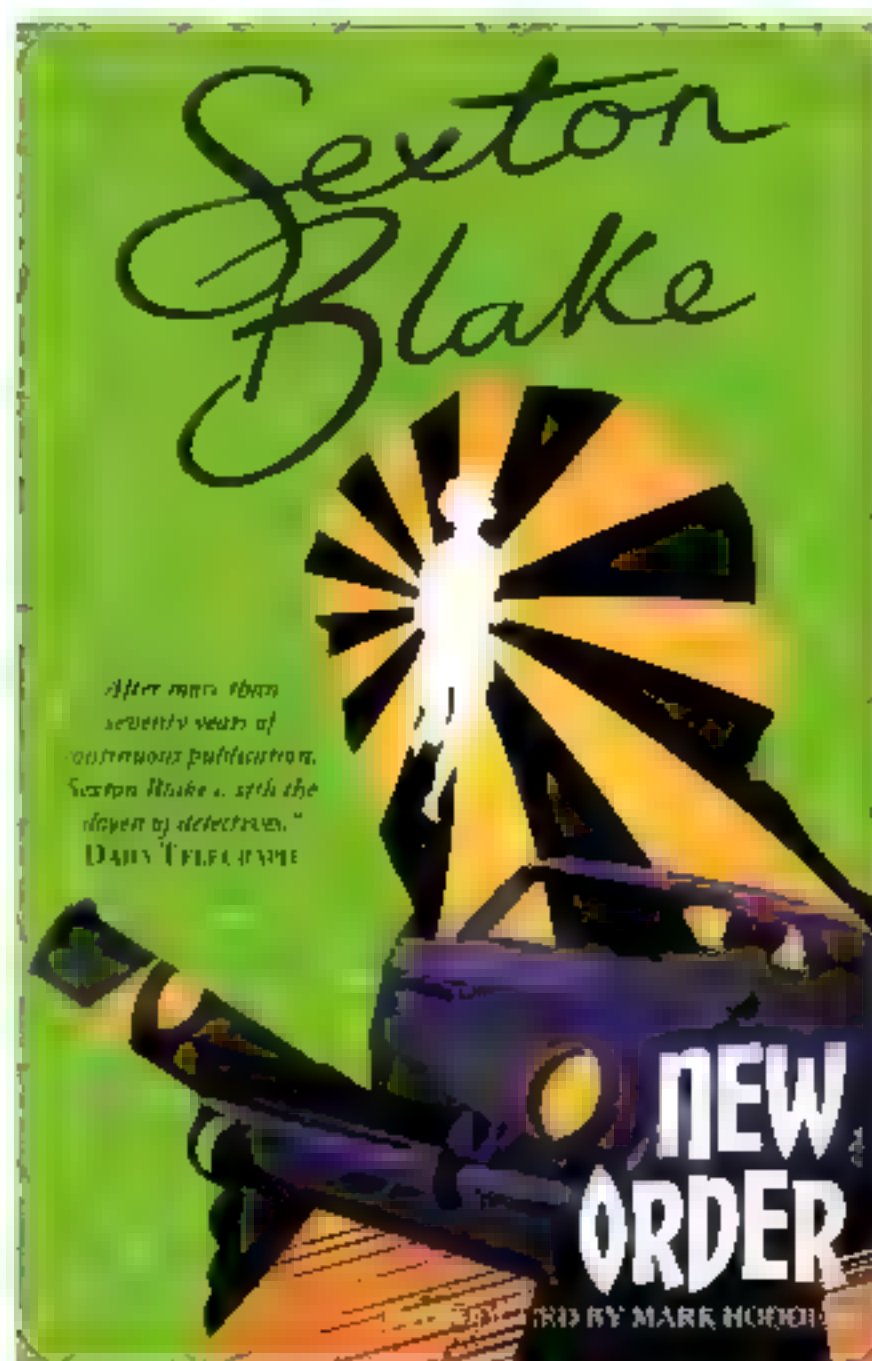
Finally, the different fonts chosen for the subtitle of each

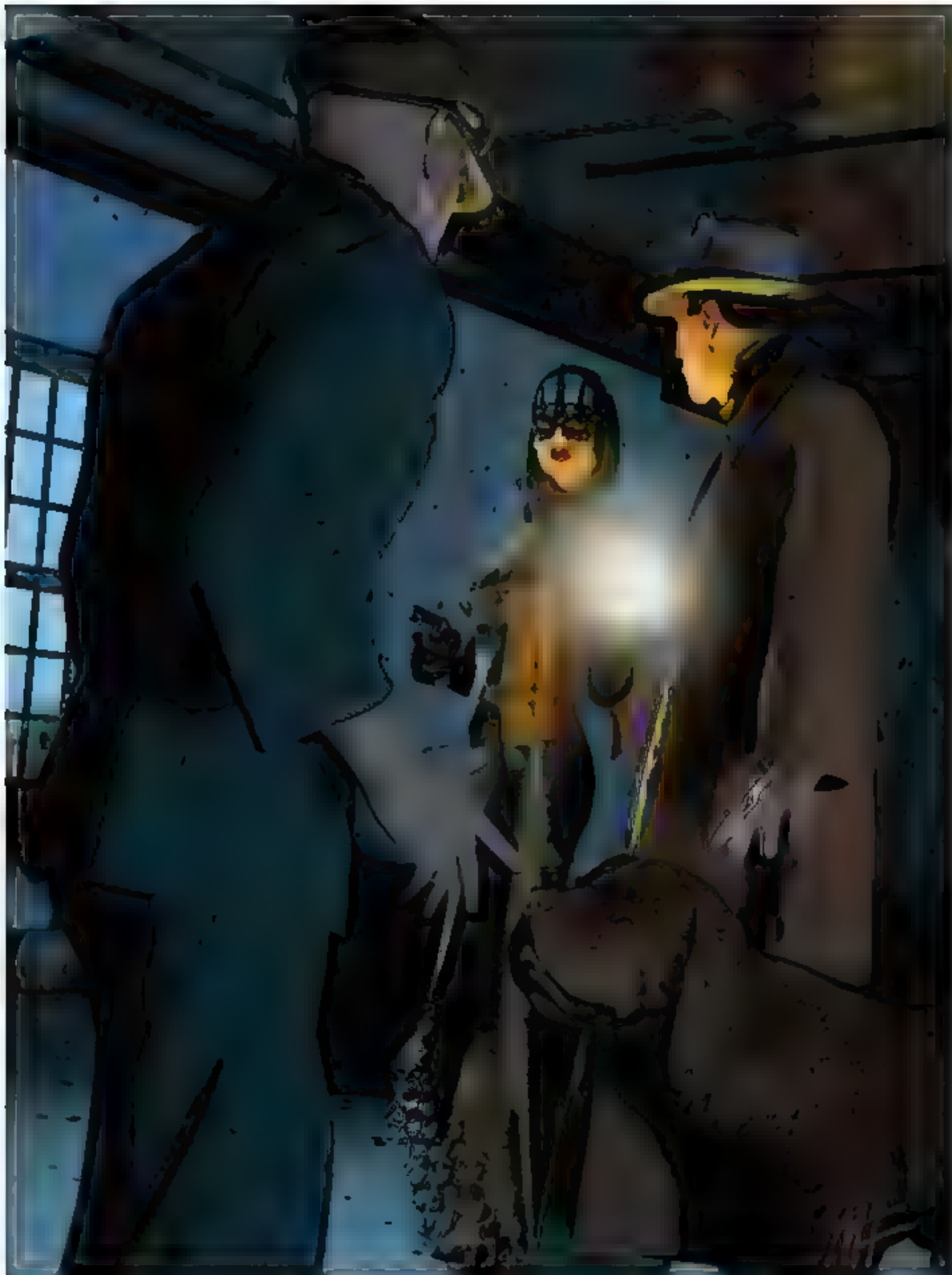


book were also a subtle reference to their era-specific nature. Again, it was a case of looking at different posters from each period, seeing the types of font that were used, and then finding something that felt appropriate for each of the books, says Bain. In each of these crucial creative decisions, there was a lot of back-and-forth perfecting with editorial at Rebellion. 'It's very important to get it right, because Sexton Blake is

such an iconic character, and he has this big history behind him,' says Bain. 'We had to do him justice, so it was very much a team effort.'

The first two volumes in the Sexton Blake Library, '... and the Great War' and '... Versus the Master Crooks', are out now, with three more to follow by next spring.





LADY MOLLY'S FIRST CASE

A SPLENDID, COMPLETE STORY OF SEXTON BLAKE,
IN WHICH A WOMAN SHINES AS A DETECTIVE

BY E. SEMPILL AKA M. STORM
PENNY PICTORIAL ISSUE 499 (19TH DECEMBER, 1908)

"HALLO, Blake," said Captain Maxwell. "So glad you could come. I see you've brought your guns; that's right. The birds are strong and a bit wild."

"So much the better," said Blake, clambering out of the dogcart, and shaking hands with his host. "I hate the usual wholesale slaughter."

He glanced keenly at Captain Maxwell as he spoke, for it was clear that that usually genial and cheery person was not himself, though he was trying hard to conceal the fact.

"What's up, old man?" said Blake, as they passed out of earshot of the servants; "there's something curious, I'll swear."

"No, nothing—nothing at all."

"Don't talk rubbish; you're about as used to concealment as old Rover the dog there."

"Bother your sharp eyes," growled Maxwell. "As a matter of fact I am a bit worried, but I'm hanged if I'm going to spoil your holiday for you."

"What's the trouble? I may be able to help."

"Well, the truth is, some deuced unpleasant things are going on. We've a large party in the house, and—well, to put it bluntly, people have

been missing things—valuable things—and it's jolly awkward."

Blake gave vent to a low whistle.

"Just as well I came."

"Oh, hang it all, old man, they're my guests; we can't have any scandal, especially at this season of the year, but it's worrying me out of my senses."

"Hardly anyone knows about it as yet; people have been awfully decent, and those who have lost things, instead of kicking up a fuss, have just come and told me quietly."

"What's missing?"

"Mostly small things, but very valuable. Lady Harrisford has lost a ruby pendant, Molly a couple of black pearl earrings, and old Mrs. Maitland a diamond cross made of seven picked stones, worth roughly a hundred apiece."

He gave rather a dismal sort of a chuckle.

"The only funny bit about it is that Molly has gone into your business on her own account; she's furious at my asking you down just now—sort of professional rivalry, you see. She's made up her mind to solve the puzzle by herself, and regards you as an interloper."

Blake smiled.

"In that case the etiquette of the profession prevents my interfering openly, but I'll keep my eyes skinned all the same."

"Thanks, old chap; and now you've just time to change before the car comes round to take us to the covers. Hallo, talk of the—I should say, here comes Molly herself."

Lady Molly came out on to the frosted lawn, through one of the long French windows.

She was neatly gartered, and wore a short, leather-bound shooting-skirt and a Norfolk jacket.

Blake took off his hat and held out his hand

She just touched it, with the very tips of her fingers, and tilted her nose a trifle in the air.

Her uncle chuckled and winked at Blake.

Lady Molly flashed round on him.

"I saw you smile; you've been telling him all about it already. It's too bad of you."

Lady Molly always walked with the guns, but she didn't shoot, though she was an excellent shot.

The birds were too strong, and it was blowing a quarter of a gale

They lunched at one of the farms, and then moved off to another set of covers on the far side of the valley, and Blake lost sight of Lady Molly altogether.

Getting on towards dusk, he made up his mind to ignore the motor and walk home for the sake of the exercise, so, leaving the others, he struck off across country.

He had gone about three miles when he glimpsed a sight ahead of him which set him running for all he was worth.

Far away down the snow-covered road was Lady Molly, who apparently had also preferred the tramp home.

She was swinging along with her light, easy steps, when two men suddenly sprang out of the ditch

by the roadside—rough-looking customers—and ran towards her. It was then that Blake also started to run.

He was a good way off, though, and it was as desolate a stretch of country as could well be found, even in that part.

Lady Molly, however, was capable of taking care of herself, for all that she looked such a slip of a girl.

She had under her arm her stout shooting stick, with a big crooked handle, like a shepherd's crook

As the first man ran at her, slightly in advance of the other, Blake saw her body bend and her arm shoot out in a swift lunge

The shod point caught the fellow neatly in the throat, and he threw up his hands and went staggering back, reeling like a drunken man.

Lady Molly recovered herself swiftly and easily, before he could even attempt to grab the stick, and waited for the next.

This time she adopted different tactics, using the crooked end

She waited till the second man was almost on to her, then she took one swift step aside, caught his near ankle with the crook as he blundered past, and gave a jerk and a twist.

Down went the man flat on his face, and Blake could have sworn he heard her laugh.

He shouted as he ran, and she turned her head, though still keeping a watchful eye on the gentleman with the injured throat.

He, however, catching sight of Blake, turned and bolted, and his companion picked himself up and followed suit as hard as he could.

Blake drew level with Lady Molly, gave them ninety yards start, and fired at their legs.

A yelp told him that some of the pellets, at any rate, had stung them up, and that one man would walk with a limp for the next week

"Earmarked that chap, anyway," said Blake grimly, and threw out the empty cartridge. "By Jove, Molly, you've got pack. I never saw anything neater in my life. I believe you could have tackled the two of them all by yourself."

She laughed, and swept a wisp of hair out of her eyes.

"I believe I could; but then you see I was expecting something of the sort."

Blake stared.

"Expecting! What do you mean. Why on earth didn't you go back on the car with the others, then?"

"Oh, I wanted to give them a chance and make sure," was the cool reply. "I can take care of myself, though I certainly hadn't counted upon there being two of them."

Blake whistled softly.

"You're a most extraordinary young woman."

"At any rate, you see I haven't forgotten some of the tricks you taught me."

"At any rate I shall tell your uncle not to let you go roaming about alone, if this sort of thing is going to happen."

"Oh, no; you won't," she said quickly, and shot at him a glance and a smile.

"Is it to be peace or war?" she asked softly.

Blake laughed.

"Have it your own way, then. It shall be peace; and you're a witch. I won't do anything unless you ask me."

"You promise not to interfere. You know what I mean."

"I promise, though I don't see why I should let you rob me of my bread-and-butter; also you must explain your acquaintances of the ditch."

"Very well, now we're friends again; only I was horribly afraid you'd want to interrupt just as I was getting on so nicely, and I was furious with uncle and with you, too."

She put her arm through his with something of her old tomboy air of camaraderie.

"Perhaps I'll reward you for the bread-and-butter some day. Now, to begin with, I know who is taking the jewels, but I can't prove it, and I can't find the jewels. And what's more, the woman—yes, it is a woman—who is the thief, knows that I know."

"If she could have got me hurt a bit, badly enough to keep me to my rooms for a few days, it would prevent my keeping an eye on her, and give her a chance to get away with what she has stolen, do you see; and also I think she would have liked me to get knocked about a bit; she's quite spiteful enough, and she's frightened to death into the bargain."

"As a matter of fact, I practically saw her arrange for this little scene, and I know that one of those men has been dodging about wherever I went, for a couple of days past, so this morning I took particular pains to let her know that I intended walking back this way by myself, with the result you have seen. Of course that's proof positive to you or me, but not to other people. Also it brings us no nearer the jewels, and I want my earrings badly—very badly; and, since she has made such a silly mistake as to set these stupid men on to me, I mean to have them and the other things, and I mean to win the game."

The strong, white, pearly teeth closed with a snap, and the small determined chin upraised itself a little.

Lady Molly was a most uncommonly hard headed, quick witted young woman with an iron will, intuition developed to an extraordinary degree, and absolutely without nerves in the common acceptance of the term.

"Let's hear all about it," said Blake, filing his pipe, as they strode along. "I've promised not to meddle, but I may be able to help."

"Well, the first thing to go was Lady Harristord's pendant. I knew nothing about it till later, and then uncle told me

"It was last Thursday, we'd all had to dress in a frightful rush, as we were late. The maid is quite positive that she herself clasped the chain of the pendant round Lady Harristord's neck, but all the same, in the middle of the evening, the pendant was gone, and the chain, too—a thin platinum one.

"Lady Harristord said nothing then, thinking that in the hurry her maid had forgotten it

"I remember that just before the time it was missed we'd been playing tricks with cards, and blowing out candles, and that sort of thing. So when uncle told me about it, I thought it was very likely the pendant had caught in something and the chain snapped, in which case it was quite possible that the ruby had rolled into a corner, or under the furniture.

"When everyone had gone to bed, I came down again and had a hunt for it. I didn't find the pendant, but I did find something else which set me thinking.

"Tucked away right under the old Japanese cabinet, which is far too heavy to move, I found the platinum chain, and it had not been broken, it had been cut with a pair of scissors or nippers, for the ends of the severed link were quite smooth and level. Also a thing like a chain couldn't have rolled to where I found it, could it?

"Of course I saw at once that whilst we were romping about, and all interested in the games and things, someone had cut the chain deliberately, and stolen the pendant, and, later on, thrown away the chain into what seemed a safe hiding place."

Blake nodded.

"That's quite sound and logical; a good bit of reasoning on your part, Molly."

She flashed another quick smile at him.

"I don't know whether you will say the same about the next part. But you know how it is, on

thinking things over, one can sometimes recall visual impressions.

"As I stood there, all by myself, dangling the chain on my fingers, I got a distinct sort of memory picture of Lady Harristord's pendant swaying to and fro in front of her as she was trying one of the tricks, and of her tossing it impatiently over her shoulder so that it hung down behind out of her way, and later on a second picture of someone, a woman, standing next her, putting up her hand with a quick movement as though to rearrange it for her

"Of course, at the time it seemed nothing, but afterwards I remembered it, but I couldn't remember who the woman was.

"Two days later I lost my pearl earrings. I had gone up to my room, taken my earrings off, and put them down on the dressing table, and someone called to me—I forget who, it was quite unimportant—to arrange a foursome for the next day, I think, and I went out leaving my door open.

"There were three or four other of the women folk coming along to their rooms with their candles; the men were still downstairs.

"When I got back the earrings were gone, I didn't call out or do anything. I just shut my door and locked it, and began to search round

"Of course, I knew at once that they had been stolen, but I wanted to see if the thief had left any traces

"She had—two—and by then I knew who she was

"On the floor I found two or three wiry white hairs, short things. I knew where they came from, the coat of Jock, my white West Highland terrier

"Now Jock is never allowed upstairs, and never attempts to come. I hadn't been near him all the evening, but one woman—the woman—had been nursing him for hours, and his coat was coming out rather badly.

"To make perfectly sure, I examined my dress most carefully. If there had been any stray hairs there would have been dozens; as a matter of fact there were none on it."

"Capital," said Blake. "What next?"

"I just sat down to think. Of course I had no real proof, but to myself there wasn't the slightest shadow of doubt—the woman had seen me go into someone else's room, possibly had noticed that I was without my earrings, and had taken her chance.

"Even if I had had any doubt, the next day settled it. The men had gone out shooting, some of us played golf, and three or four more stopped at home writing letters; amongst them the woman.

"We got back rather late from our game, and the first person I saw was old Mrs. Maitland, who took me on one side and told me that her cross was missing. It was in her jewel-case on a table in her room a little before one, and she had discovered the loss quite accidentally about ten minutes before I met her."

"Had the jewel-case been forced?"

"No; it was unlocked. Of course, you see, she knew nothing of the other thefts, so took no special care."

"And it being the servants' dinner-hour, of course the thief had a clear field."

Lady Molly nodded.

"That's just it."

"I wonder she didn't make a clean sweep."

"No, she couldn't do that; she can only take things that are small as well as very valuable."

Blake shot a quick glance at her, but said nothing. It occurred to him that the brain beneath those wavy masses of chestnut hair was nearly as good as his own, for he could see no reason why the things stolen need of necessity be so very small.

"Well," continued Lady Molly, "I went straight up to Mrs. Maitland's rooms, begging her to say

nothing to anyone; and there, right in front of me, staring me in the face, was proof positive that my conclusions were correct. For one of the first things I saw was a gilt hairpin lying on the rug. Mrs. Maitland's hair is iron-grey."

"And gilt hairpins are only worn by very fair-haired women," interposed Blake.

"Humph! I didn't expect a mere man to know that," said Lady Molly, rather indignant; "still, it's a fact. Women with very fair hair or"—sniff—"peroxide, use them. The woman who nursed my Jock has very fair hair. So, there, though I've mentioned no names, you've only got to use your eyes. What do you think of my case?"

"I think," said Blake slowly, "that you're wasting your time, Molly, by playing about with a lot of empty-headed people when you might be doing really good, useful work."

She flashed.

"Now that's the nicest thing you've ever said to me, and I believe you mean it; though, mind you, I could never have done it unless you'd told me things you know—I mean, unless you'd explained some of your own cases to me."

"What next?" asked Blake. "You've left out a lot of things. Those men, for instance."

"Ah, the next thing was a bad mistake. I was so excited with my discovery that I forgot myself. I went down into the big hall with that hairpin still in my hand, and the very first person I met was the woman.

"She saw it and put her hand up to her head. She didn't say a word, nor did I, but our eyes met and I could see that she knew that I knew. She hated me before that, for—well, for other reasons."

Blake smiled to himself in the dusk.

"But from that moment, as well as hating me, she was frightened out of her wits, and she is absolutely unscrupulous

"I knew at once that she meant to do me a nasty

turn if she could, and she knew I meant to expose her as soon as I got the chance.

"It was two days after that that I saw her giving money to a common-looking man when she thought we were all ever so far away. That's why I told you I was rather expecting something of the sort that has just happened."

"I see; but what about the jewels?"

"Well, I got Uncle Bob to take her off for a long drive, and I searched her rooms from top to bottom, I searched them thoroughly, even the window-sill, and the gutter outside. You told me a story about that once, you remember, but, of course, I found nothing.

"She's much too artful to leave them in any place where an inquisitive servant might stumble across them; besides, not a thing in her room was locked up, and in the case of a woman with her natural secretiveness, that in itself was suspicious.

"Then I had a big, long think—big thinks like Kipling's monkey folk.

"I remembered that hairpin, I remembered that meeting in the hall, and then in a flash I knew exactly where she had hidden them. Where do you think? Guess."

"I gave it up."

"In her hair, that's why she only takes small things of great value, and that's why the moment she saw that hairpin in my hand she immediately raised her own to her head. Think what a safe hiding-place it is. She has no maid.

"If challenged with the theft, she would immediately demand to have her boxes and dresses searched, no one would think of interfering with her hair.

"Again, supposing anyone came on her unexpectedly in their room, she would immediately pretend to be tidying her hair in the glass by the dressing-table, and trump up some excuse about wanting to see them for a minute or two."

"By Jove, that's ingenious. I believe you're right. Wait a moment, though. How about the post?"

Lady Molly shook her head.

"Very risky; besides, as you know, we're miles from an office, and only have one post in and out every day; telegrams, and so on, are sent by telephone. But, not only that, since the very first day I guessed the truth, I made Uncle Bob give me the key of the mail bag, and I go through it myself the last thing.

"No; these jewels are in her hair right enough; and when she leaves, in three days' time, they will leave with her, unless we can stop it, and one can't very well use force.

"That's why she was so particularly keen to get me laid up, she's afraid I might, as a last resort, openly challenge her; and though, of course, she'd deny everything, it would be awkward."

"Have you any plan?"

"Yes, I have, and that's where I'd like your help, now you're here. She's in a deadly fright of fire. She was in one once, and had a narrow escape; it's about the one thing she is terrified of. You and I must have a fire."

"But even then she may go to bed with her hair done up."

Lady Molly snuffed again.

"Didn't I tell you she uses peroxide? There are discoloured spots all over the rug in front of her looking glass," she said, rather spitefully. "Her hair is really blackish, and she has to dab the roots of it nearly every evening with a weak solution.

"She must take it down for that, and leave it down, so she can't hide my earrings there at night. She'll put them under her pillow or the mattress.

"What you've got to do is to arrange a nice fire, with plenty of smoke—to-night if you like—and I'll be on hand, and see that Uncle Bob is, too."

Blake spent a busy hour before dinner in the gun room emptying cartridges and damping the contents.

At dinner-time he had no difficulty in recognising the woman as a Mrs. Smithers, a big blonde woman, handsome, in rather a florid sort of way, with hard eyes and a bad mouth, very expensively dressed, and very expansively displayed as to shoulders.

She talked a great deal and laughed a great deal, but every now and again the hard eyes dwelt furtively on Lady Molly, and her gaiety seemed a trifle overdone.

It was just one in the morning when Blake scratched on Molly's door, and lit his home-made firework.

In a few minutes there was a dense cloud of smoke in the corridor, and an acrid smell of burning brown paper.

He and Molly had rehearsed the scene carefully.

He waited a little longer, and then raised a cry of fire, which was taken up by a shrill scream from Molly.

Doors began to open, and people marvellously attired and unattired came rushing out.

"All right," shouted Blake. "It's not got a real hold yet; fetch water, some of you, quickly."

Just then Mrs. Smithers' door opened, and she came flying out wrapped in a kimono.

There was no doubt as to the genuineness of her terror; her face was livid, her hair all damp and hanging anyhow.

The fire, as a matter of fact, had reached a curtain, and was blazing realistically enough. She caught sight of it and screamed hysterically, nearly fainting.

Blake dropped his jug of water and grabbed her just in time.

Without hesitating, he picked her up and carried her back to her room.

Molly was already there beside the bed, and her uncle was at the door.

"Lock it," she said sharply; and he did so.

Blake set Mrs. Smithers down.

Lady Molly looked at her.

"It's no use making all that fuss," she said scornfully. "There is no fire to speak of; it's only a trick."

Then, with one hand, she wrenched away the pillows.

Beneath them lay the missing jewels, the diamond cross sparkling in the candlelight.

There was dead silence for a moment, then Mrs. Smithers shivered and moaned a little.

Captain Maxwell's face grew hard.

"There is an early train at nine to-morrow," he said slowly. "The motor will be ready for you at a quarter past eight; you had better be punctual. I will explain that the alarm of fire upset you."

Molly said nothing, but knotted the jewels in her handkerchief.

Blake smiled.

"Your first case," said he. "If you manage the next as well, I shall chuck up business; you'll take all my clients away."

"The bread-and-butter?" said Molly smiling.

"To the last crust."

"I promised you a reward if you were good, didn't I?"

Blake nodded.

"Come here, then." He went and stood close to her. She was smiling, and her eyes were sparkling with mischief.

Before he realised what she was doing, she had raised herself on tiptoe, and deliberately kissed him, then she pointed ceilingwards and darted away laughing.

Blake looked up and saw that she had lured him all unsuspectingly under a big bunch of mistletoe.

"Mux!" he said, and chuckled to himself. "But I'm glad I earned my reward."

THE END

THE CASE OF THE SEVENTH KEY

BY W. W. SAYER
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THE FIRST CHAPTER

The Caller and the Key.

THE MAN WHO entered Sexton Blake's consulting-room in Baker Street was a little below the average height, but of thick-set and sturdy appearance.

A reddish, drooping moustache concealed his mouth, and his features were somewhat flat and characterless except for a certain shrewd glint of his small, restless eyes. He was dressed inconspicuously, his clothes being a trifle threadbare, and altogether there was little about him to arouse one's interest or curiosity.

Appraising his visitor with one of his swift, searching glances Sexton Blake put him down at once as a foreigner, but was rather doubtful of his nationality. Neither could he answer the question when the newcomer spoke with just a faint, puzzling trace of accent.

"You are the Mr. Sexton Blake referred to here?" he inquired, thrusting forward a newspaper and pointing with his finger.

Blake casually noticed that his visitor's hand trembled—the only sign he gave of being mentally agitated.

Glancing at the newspaper, Blake saw that it was that morning's issue of the "Daily Mail." The article in question was concerned with the theft of a pearl necklace that had occurred at Kensington the previous night, and the paragraph to which his visitor pointed went as follows:

"Doubtless the necklace has already been disposed of to a receiver of stolen property, or a 'fence' to employ the term used by the criminal fraternity. These men openly carry on a legitimate trade as a blind to their unlawful but more lucrative enterprise, and although their illicit business is suspected probably most of the 'fences' in London are known to that shrewd investigator, Mr. Sexton Blake, of Baker Street—yet it is exceedingly difficult to catch them in the act of handling the stolen goods."

Having perused this brief reference to himself, Blake glanced across at his visitor.

"Yes," he admitted, "apparently I am the person referred to there, Mr—"

"Falcon—John Falcon," interpolated the other.

"Mr. Falcon," nodded Blake. "And is it concerning this stolen necklace that you have come to consult me, Mr. Falcon?"

"No, no!" replied his visitor somewhat hastily. "I know nothing about this stolen necklace; it does not concern me. But the paper says you are acquainted with men who receive stolen property. It was when I read that these men were known to you that I thought you might be able to help me."

"Help you in what way, Mr. Falcon?"

"By recovering something that I have lost, sir."

"I see," said Blake slowly. "You have lost some article that you have reason to suppose has been disposed of to a receiver of stolen property?"

"I have been robbed!" came the excited reply. "My pocket was picked less than an hour ago. I was in Mare Street at the time, having lunch. I know it must have happened then, because a moment before the things were in my pocket."

"Mare Street, Hackney," said Blake reflectively. "And what things were taken from your pocket, Mr. Falcon?"

"Several things," replied the other vaguely. "There was a key," he added with some hesitation, "which I am very eager to recover. The other things don't matter so long as that is returned to me. That key is of no value to the thief, and I am prepared to give him five pounds for its return and to ask no questions."

"Um-m!" murmured Blake. "But I am afraid the key won't help us to get on the track of the thief, Mr. Falcon. He certainly wouldn't have taken the key to a fence expecting to raise money on it."

"No, no; I'm aware of that. But there was something else—an old-fashioned pair of gold

earrings each set with a single diamond weighing about two carats. They were in a washleather bag with the key."

"Ah, they certainly might help us to get on the track of the thief. Probably those earrings are already in the hands of a fence. Was there anything else in the washleather bag?"

"Nothing else, sir."

"Then that is the extent of your loss?"

"Not quite. I had two ten-shilling notes in the same pocket. They were also stolen."

"In which pocket?" asked Blake.

"In this one," said Falcon, indicating the inner pocket of his coat.

"And you say the theft occurred in Mare Street, Hackney?"

"Yes; I was having lunch in a little eating house at the time. It was when I came to feel for my money that I discovered my loss."

"And what was the name of this eating house?"

"I did not notice the name. But there is a fire-station immediately opposite. It was rather dark inside, and it was crowded at the time."

"Well, I'm afraid there's little chance of recovering your earrings for you, Mr. Falcon. The stones will soon be removed and the gold melted down."

"I am not asking for the recovery of the earrings," said Falcon quickly. "It is the key that I am so anxious to get back. As I said before, I am willing to pay five pounds for its return and to ask no questions. It is the key to a certain safe, you understand? And its loss will occasion me considerable inconvenience."

"What is the key like? Describe it to me."

"A key about three inches long. But it has the figure seven engraved on the shaft—you will know it by that."

"And the earrings, have they any further distinguishing marks?"

"They are shaped in the form of a twisted serpent."

"Yes, I will try to recover that key for you," said Blake, "although I cannot promise to be successful. Where can I communicate with you, Mr. Falcon?"

"I am leaving for France at once," replied the other. "That is my country, as you have probably already guessed. But I have no fixed address at present, as I am constantly travelling to and fro. If you should recover that key, please insert a message in the personal column of the 'Continental Daily Mail,' and I will get in touch with you immediately."

"Um-m! All this sounds a little mysterious," observed Blake, eyeing his visitor shrewdly. "I suppose you do not feel disposed to take me more fully into your confidence, Mr. Falcon?"

At this suggestion Falcon appeared to grow suddenly irritated and confused, while little beads of perspiration glistened on his forehead.

"There is no need of farther confidence," he muttered half angrily. "I have asked you to undertake a simple task for me, and surely my personal affairs do not enter into the matter!"

"Well, perhaps not, Mr. Falcon. At any rate, we will not inquire into your personal affairs at the present stage. I will go along to Hackney at once and see if I can recover this key for you. If I am successful, I will communicate with you by the method you suggest."

"Thank you. Then here are the five pounds I offer for its return. What is your fee, sir, for acting for me in this matter?"

"We will leave that until the next occasion," said Blake dryly. "But supposing the thief refuses to part with your key for five pounds, what then?"

"He will jump at the offer," said Falcon confidently. "The key is of not the slightest value to him. And now I must leave, sir; I have a train to

catch." The visitor said this with a note of relief, and he rose hastily from his chair, as if only too anxious to make his departure.

Then suddenly he started violently, and gave an exclamation. For the first time he had noticed Tinker sitting half concealed in the easy chair by the fire.

"I thought we were alone, sir!" he cried in excited tones, turning swiftly on Sexton Blake.

"Then obviously you were mistaken," replied Blake gravely. "However, you need have no cause for alarm. My assistant is entirely in my confidence."

Falcon glanced again at Tinker with obvious suspicion, muttered something below his breath, then gave an uneasy chuckle, and hastily made his departure.

"A queer customer, that!" remarked Blake, thoughtfully, glancing at the door as it closed on his perturbed visitor.

"He certainly was," agreed Tinker, getting up from his chair. "Almost jumped out of his skin when he spotted me."

"Got the jim-jams over something," muttered Blake, and then, with sudden decision, added: "Just follow him, Tinker, and see if you can find out more about him."

Accustomed as he was to act instantly in such a circumstance as this, Tinker stayed not to argue the matter.

Left alone, Blake still remained glancing at the door for some moments, as if pondering something in his mind. Then he pushed back his chair and got into his hat and coat.

He was just about to leave the room when the door was flung open and Tinker entered, looking somewhat hot and bothered.

"Gave me the sup, guv'nor," he growled resentfully. "Saw a cab just starting away from the rank along the road, he must have been in

that. But I couldn't get hold of another quick enough to follow."

"Nuisance!" muttered Blake. "Can't be helped, though. Something rummy about our friend Falcon. That's not his real name, of course."

"It doesn't sound French, guv'nor."

"And neither is he a Frenchman, Tinker, in spite of what he said. I was puzzled to know what his nationality was, until he gave himself away at the last moment. He's a Czech, unless I'm greatly mistaken."

"A Czech, guv'nor! What makes you think that?"

"By that startled exclamation he let out when he spotted you in the chair, Tinker."

"What was it he said? Sounded to me something like chemese."

"So it was, only it's spelt P-R-S-H-E-M-Y-S-L in the Czech language. And Prshemysl is the name of a town in Czecho-Slovakia. It also happens to be the name of a legendary Bohemian king. And I suppose our friend Falcon uttered it in much the same way as we might exclaim 'Great Scott!'"

"You're cute, guv'nor," muttered Tinker admiringly. "Don't suppose anyone else would have noticed a little thing like that."

"You flatter me!" observed Blake dryly. "Well here's another little thing that may interest you. The Czech word for 'falcon' is 'sokol.' And the Sokol happens to be the name of a society that exercises a very strong influence in the lives of the Czech people. It is easy to understand, therefore, why our mysterious friend Falcon should have instinctively chosen that name."

"Why, you're a walking encyclopaedia, guv'nor!" laughed Tinker. "But what do you make of his yarn?"

"Nothing much at present. But our friend Falcon has aroused my curiosity. I can't quite get to the bottom of him, that's why I did not hesitate

to take on what purported to be a simple case of pick pocketing. At any rate, I'm going along to Hackney to investigate his story. Perhaps there's nothing in it after all. We shall see."

"Then I'll come along with you, guv'nor."

"No," said Blake. "I want to know where Falcon went to when he left here. If he took a cab from the rank along the road, you shouldn't have much difficulty in getting hold of the taxi man when he returns and finding out from him where he dropped our friend Falcon."

"That should be easy, guv'nor," said Tinker. "I'll go along to the rank."

The two of them left the house together and parted outside, Tinker going off to execute his commission and Blake clambering on a bus going in the direction of Hackney.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Kelly "Cops a Packet",

A HALF HOUR or so later Sexton Blake dismounted in Mare Street, and walked along to the fire-station. A little eating-house was immediately opposite, as Falcon had stated. So much of his story was apparently true.

Blake crossed the road and casually glanced inside. It was an evil-smelling little restaurant, of dingy and uninviting aspect. Obviously, its clients were not exactly fastidious with regard to their palates. At the present moment it was empty, save for its fat and greasy-faced proprietor, whose name, Tim Booker, was painted in faded characters above, for it was now in the middle of the afternoon.

Having made his cursory inspection, Blake turned away and walked on swiftly. A few moments later he had plunged into the network of mean streets of that insalubrious neighbourhood known as London Fields.

The writer of the paragraph in the "Mail" had not exaggerated the case when he had stated that probably most of the "fences" in the metropolis were known to the Baker Street criminologist. Sexton Blake's knowledge of the underworld was exhaustive; he was acquainted with nearly all the secret haunts of the criminal fraternity, and, indeed, experienced little difficulty in gaining admittance to that most exclusive society when the occasion demanded it.

So now his task was a comparatively simple one. He could name half a dozen "fences" in the immediate vicinity off hand, and if any one of them had handled the property stolen from Mr. Falcon he felt that he could secure the return of the key by the use of a little judicious persuasion.

But as chance would have it, Blake was saved the trouble of making inquiries himself. For as he

was directing his steps to his first place of call he happened to have an unexpected meeting with an "old lag."

Turning the corner of a certain narrow, squalid street, he almost collided with a short, ferrety-faced individual, of unshaven and seedy appearance, who was shuffling along with his hands thrust deep into his pockets and his greasy cap pulled down low over his brow.

The man shuffled out of Blake's path with a sullen growl, and would have passed on had not Blake suddenly grasped him by the shoulder.

"What, you, Kelly!" he exclaimed. "So they let you out, have they?"

Mick Kelly started violently as if he were burdened by an uneasy conscience which probably he was—and instinctively shook himself free from Blake's grasp. But immediately he recognised the identity of his accoster a furtive grin crept into his face.

"Yus, I've just got me ticket, Mr. Blake," he sniggered. "Came out only yesterday. Had a stretch this time."

"Well, you needn't crow about it," observed Blake. "Hope you will be running straight this time, Kelly."

"Thankee kind y, Mr. Blake, but I reckon it's too late to turn over a new leaf at my time o' life," was the old lag's philosophical reply.

"I'm sorry to hear you say that, Kelly. Never too late to mend, you know. What's doing—anything?"

"Nothing in particular, Mr. Blake. Reckon I'm jest strolling round for my 'ealth, like yerself," said Mick Kelly. And he sniggered again.

"Strolling around is sometimes an unhealthy occupation," admonished Blake, preparing to

depart. "But I'm afraid you are incorrigible, Kelly. Well, here's a ten-shilling note for you. Dare say the brewers will profit by it."

And, thrusting the note into old Mick's palm, he turned away.

But he had scarcely taken a couple of steps when he stopped abruptly, struck by a sudden idea.

"One moment, Kelly," he called. "Do you happen to know that little restaurant in Mare Street, opposite the fire-station?"

"Wot, ole Tim Booker's?" asked Kelly.

"Yes, that's the name. What were you doing there at lunch-time to-day, Kelly?"

Blake eyed the old man sternly as he asked the question. But Mick Kelly's face only betrayed an innocent surprise.

"Weren't in there, Mr. Blake," he declared. "Ain't set foot in old Tim Booker's since I stepped outa 'stir' yusterday. S'elp me, if that there ain't the truth!"

"Um-m. So you're not guilty this time, eh? Well, d'you want the chance of earning an honest fiver?"

Old Mick's manner immediately became suspicious.

"Honest is it, mister?" he questioned doubtfully. "Wot's the game?"

"I was just about to pay a visit to certain friends of yours round here," explained Blake, "but probably you can save me the trouble. Listen, Kelly, a certain person, whose name we need not mention, had his pocket picked while lunching at Tim Booker's to-day. Two ten-shilling notes were stolen from him and a washleather bag, which contained a pair of old-fashioned earrings and a key. The key had the figure seven engraved on the shaft, and the earrings were of gold, shaped like twisted serpents, and each set with a single diamond weighing about two carats. Are you following me?"

"With both ears, Mr. Blake."

"Very well. Now, that key is of no value to the thief, while its loss will occasion my client considerable inconvenience. Therefore, he is very anxious to recover it. Bring that key to me, Kelly, and you will earn five pounds. I promise you no questions will be asked. Are you taking it on?"

"Sounds easy money," muttered old Kelly dubiously. "Sure there ain't no ketch in it?"

"You have my word for it, Kelly."

"Will yer gimme me a couple o' quid in advance, Mr. Blake?"

"I will. Here you are." Blake gazed at the old man sternly. "You play me false, Kelly," he said, "and I'll refuse to help you the next time you are in trouble."

"I'm playing straight, Mr. Blake," replied Mick Kelly. "Well, I'll say so-long! You'll be seeing me again shortly if I'm lucky."

Blake watched him turn the corner, then proceeded to retrace his steps, feeling satisfied at having saved himself an irksome task.

When he arrived back at Baker Street he found Tinker already awaiting him in the consulting-room.

"No luck, guv'nor!" he said. "Falcon didn't go off in that cab. It's curious he should have vanished so suddenly after leaving here."

"You got hold of the taxi man?"

"Yes; he said he dropped his fare at the Bank—a tall, clean-shaven man, wearing a silk hat. It certainly couldn't have been Falcon."

"Obviously not. Funny he should have disappeared so suddenly."

"That's what's puzzling me, guv'nor. Did you manage to find out anything?"

"I happened to meet old Mick Kelly in London Fields," explained Blake. "He came out of quod only yesterday. So I saved myself further trouble by passing the job onto him."

"The old gaolbird!" chuckled Tinker. "So he's out again! Probably it was he who picked Falcon's pocket."

"No, I don't think so, Tinker. But I bet it won't take old Mick long to discover the thief. One of his charmed circle of acquaintances, I'll be bound. Well, we shall see!"

With this reflection Blake turned his attention to other matters, and for the time being no further reference was made to the mysterious Mr. Falcon's affairs.

It was not until nearly nine o'clock that night that he was again reminded of the matter, and in a somewhat curious fashion, when Mrs. Bardell, his housekeeper, appeared at the door of the consulting-room to announce a visitor.

"A little ragamuffin girl, Mr. Blake," she explained disdainfully. "I don't like the looks of her. Shall I send her about her business?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Bardell—that is, show her up at once," replied Blake.

Mrs. Bardell departed with a sniff; and a moment later there sidled into the room a little, pinched-faced girl of some nine or ten years of age. Her clothes were in rags, her hair tousled and hanging untidily about her face; she wore no stockings, and from the pair of old shoes that clung to her feet her toes were peeping forth.

Standing there timidly, clutching a boy's cap in her dirty fingers, she gazed about her with wondering eyes, as if never before had she beheld from such close quarters the interior of a civilised habitation.

"Well, young lady, and what can I do for you?" inquired Blake in his kindly tones.

"Please, sir, dad ses as 'ow I've gotta give the message ter Mr. Blake," came the reply, as if it had been learned by heart.

"Yes, I am Mr. Blake. You have a message for me?"

For answer the little girl felt beneath her ragged garments, drew forth a dirty, crumpled piece of paper, and held it out.

With some curiosity Blake unfolded it and proceeded with some difficulty to read the following, written in an almost illegible hand:

"Mr Blake, sir,—I copped a packet wots lade me out over that little job yer arsked me to do for yer this arternoon. If yer honour feels like coming along, Mary will show yer ware to find us.

"Yours respectfully,

"MICK KELLY."

Under the signature of this strange communication was an ugly, brown smudge. To Sexton Blake's expert eyes its meaning was clear—it had been made by bloodstained fingers!

Continued in
Sexton Blake Library Book 3: Allies
On sale December 2020



Sexton Blake

REBELLION

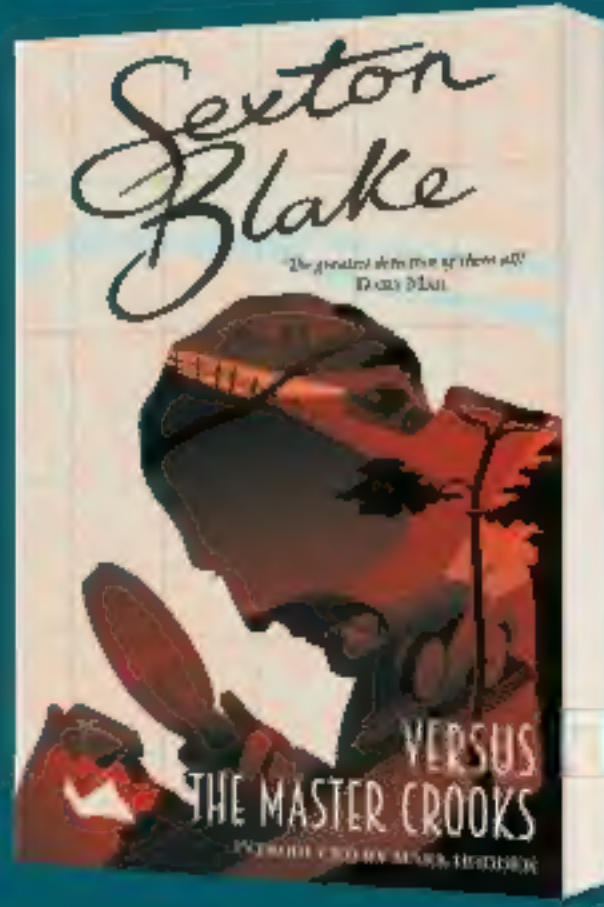
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